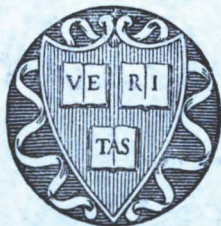


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With an Introduction by LADY FLORENCE DIXIE

6<sub>D.</sub>

# THE RELIGION OF WOMAN



**JOSEPH McCABE**

WATTS & CO.,  
17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

**SECOND IMPRESSION**

THE RELIGION OF WOMAN



# THE RELIGION OF WOMAN

## An Historical Study

BY

JOSEPH McCABE

(Author of "*Twelve Years in a Monastery*," "*Peter Abelard*," etc.)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY LADY FLORENCE DIXIE

[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED]

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BOOKS

TO  
GEORGE ANDERSON, Esq.,  
WHOSE ACTIVE SYMPATHY  
HAS DONE SO MUCH  
FOR THIS  
CAUSE.

## INTRODUCTION

---

"A slave within the Land of Bondage, kneeling,  
Bows her bent form beneath the despot's heel.  
Pathetic picture on the landscape stealing,  
It burns into my heart and makes me feel  
That freedom must be won. For woe or weal  
I couch my lance to press the tyrant down.  
Poor slave, rise up! Thou shalt no longer  
kneel.

Behold the seed of Liberty is sown;  
Come reap with me the golden harvest when  
'tis mown."

—"The Wanderings of Isra."

I STAND on the mountain tops, above  
the misty clouds, upon the far-extending  
range of free-born thought, and, peering  
through those clouds, I behold below the  
land of bondage whereon woman, as a  
subjected slave, yields reverence to the  
despotic taskmaster who has manacled  
her. Beneath his sway her form is bent,  
and her head is bowed to the earth.  
Only in supplication are her dim eyes  
raised, and then they rest upon the  
tyrant, who oppresses her, with reverent  
homage and adoration. In him she  
sees her master and her lord. His word  
is omnipotent, his fiat law, his com-  
mands sacred, because, in her eyes, his  
mission is divine. He is the mouth-  
piece of the Maker of all things, the  
Creator of heaven and earth, and there-  
fore cannot err or order ill, for perfection  
does no wrong.

Believing this, woman submits and  
acquiesces in her slavery. She is a helot;  
she has no voice in the framing of law,  
no right to assume governing powers, no  
representation in the councils of the  
world. Even possession of her own

person is denied her. Body and soul is  
she the property of others. She has no  
right in herself.

Here and there a slave has raised her  
head and feebly questioned the justice  
of such bondage. Each and all have  
been struck down and dishonoured.  
Then others have made a dash for  
freedom, and the lash has mercilessly  
scourged them in return. Yet have they  
gone down, protesting as they fell, and  
denouncing the tyranny of the task-  
master who tortured them and oppressed  
their manacled sisters.

What is this taskmaster?

Let me cry his name to the four winds  
of heaven and over every part of the  
earth. The taskmaster who has retarded  
the progress and development of  
woman, who has sealed upon her fetters  
of iron, who has withheld from her the  
heritage of life—i.e., freedom—and who  
has subjected her to the grinding  
despotism of selfishness and falsehood,  
by whom she has been disinherited—is  
that cruel despot, that man-made idol,  
that wily serpent of intrigue and insinua-  
tion, Superstitious Religion.

Note that I say Superstitious Religion  
—not Religion. This latter, as I under-  
stand it, is a system of morality built  
upon the strong foundations of ordinary  
common sense; whereas Superstitious  
Religion is a system of faith in the  
products of imagination, belief in the  
miraculous, and credence in the unnatural  
—a worship of man-made fiats, which have  
been declared, without any substantiating

proofs, to be of divine origin. Divine origin! In the name of all that is truthful, who and what is God? Dare we, if we presume to think, uphold the analysis of this mighty mystery which man, in the early stages of his ignorance, has made? A thousand times, No! If God there be, the essence of such a being is beyond our comprehension, beyond our powers of realisation. Let us be honest and acknowledge this, and then very clearly we shall perceive that the Supreme Power we worship has been clothed by man in his own image and likeness, and endowed with many of the foibles and follies of the human being.

All the gods of superstition are man-made and the products of ignorance. As long as ignorance prevails, imagination satisfies; but the moment the light of Science irradiates the dark corners of the mind, then Truth alone can satisfy its cravings, and where this cannot penetrate it reverently exclaims: "We do not know."

Every superstitious religion, more or less, enslaves woman, and proclaims her inferiority to man. Of these strange products of man's early ignorance and selfishness there are none more potent than the one emanating from Bible precept and built on the foundations of its Old and New Testaments. I refer to Christianity. This religion dominates many nations of the earth, and, wherever it prevails, the laws governing woman are in accordance with Bible precepts.

Here are a few of these latter:—

"I suffer not the woman to teach nor usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

"Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as unto the Lord."

"Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

"She was the first in the transgression, therefore keep her in subjection."

So spoke, in this latter sentence, Christianity's firmest friend and woman's bitterest foe. To those twelve words she owes much of her degradation. To the religion which enforces and upholds them she bows in meek and humble submission. It decrees and ordains her inferiority, it commands her obedience, it enforces her adoration, and it denies her the birthright of existence—liberty. Out on the falsehood that dares to assert that woman's gradual emancipation from degradation has been brought about by the influence of Christianity. The chapters that follow this introduction will give clear proof that, far from this being the case, Christianity found her, under the protection of pagan *civilisation*, rising into honour and power, and that it forthwith pushed her back into the abyss of barbaric serfdom, and retarded for hundreds of years any attempt on her part to rise again. Pick me out, through the past nineteen hundred years, one single cleric who has ever raised his voice on behalf of the rights of that sex to which his mother belonged. Name to me one single pope, or ecclesiastic of either Catholic or Protestant denomination, who has condemned the Bible's command that woman should be held in bondage, or who has spoken out on her behalf, and declared that man's rights are hers, and that the only possible saviour of mankind is woman free. I ask the impossible, for, since Christianity was established, no cleric has so spoken. It is the business of Bibleites to obstruct the revolt of the female, and to prevent, if possible, the forces of Evolution and Civilisation from giving woman her freedom.

For what she has obtained of such woman is beholden to those two agencies. No one pretends that the first of these owes anything to Christianity, while the second is the outcome of mental development, in which freedom of thought has been the guiding factor. Science owes nothing to Christianity, which has fought against it tooth and nail; yet to scientific reasoning, and not to Bible reasoning, woman must turn to prove her earth-born rights. By religion and ignorance these rights are condemned and ridiculed. By the reasonings of science they are admitted and upheld. The noblest champions of woman's freedom in the past, and now in the present, have been, and are, men swayed by scientific truth. These men, whom Christians scornfully refer to as infidels, are lovers of truth. Truth clearly tells them that the subjection of woman is the outcome of obedience to the false. They proclaim this immoral, and demand emancipation. Will Christianity effect this? Not unless it turns its back on the Bible and its precepts, and admits the injustice and cruelty of these latter.

Will it do this? No. To disown the foundation on which its existence is built would be the sounding of its own death-knell. It is bound to protect itself, and, while its precepts rule the laws of our country, woman cannot be free.

Point blank, then, this question presents itself to her: "What must I do to obtain my redemption from the Land of Bondage in which I am a slave?" There is but one reply to this query. Here it is: "You must no longer cringe to your taskmaster. You must no longer believe in the untrue. You must no longer acquiesce in your degradation by the false. You must recognise that truth alone can save you and give you

the freedom that you need. If this be not wrenched from your taskmaster, assuredly he will never give it to you, and you will remain his bond-slave in the Land of Bondage. There you will give birth to sons, who will oppress you by reason of their ignorance and acquired selfishness. The sons of free-born women would never act thus; but the children of serfs are well-nigh the same themselves, and act accordingly."

Urgently needed is woman's emancipation and her transformation from a bond-slave to a being born in freedom. Until this desirable object is effected, progress must be slow and the elevation of humanity be retarded. This is a question which cannot be too plainly stated and submitted, not only to women, but to men as well. Let these latter ask themselves if they desire the enslavement of the female to continue. True Civilisation answers "No," because it aims at perfection, and there can be nothing of the kind where the fountain of life is held in check and drugged with poison. There is a vast unexplored region in woman's mind which has not yet been opened out because of the hypnotic spell which superstitious religion has exercised over it. Once remove that influence, and a wealth of thought will arise which shall sweep away the false, and in scientific truth reveal the road to freedom.

Science is godly because science is truth. Of what good to us or others is belief in the untrue? It will not avail us to cling to the shadows of Imagination, when common sense and proof positive proclaim them to be such. How is it possible to make real that which is not, or to endow with life the spectral ghosts of Invention? Assertion without evidence is not fact, for fact is the proven,



and superstitious religion is all assertion without the proven. In submitting, therefore, to the rule of superstitious idolatry, women accept the serfdom that accompanies it, and are slaves. They cannot leave the Land of Bondage, for their minds are fettered. Strike those fetters from the portals of their brains, and Reason shall rise triumphant. Then shall the free, upward flight of Thought carry all before it, and emancipated woman shall redeem the world by the force of majestic Truth. Upon the stern rack of research Science has stretched the Bible and mercilessly dissected it. With what result? With this. It has proved that its tissues are shams. It has unmasked its inventions, and it has made clear that its foundations are Ignorance and Superstition. This being so, shall women continue to bolster up a lie? Shall they work in and till the garden of Invention, and culture therein poisonous mushroom growths, to taste which means mental syncope? Shall they, in short, connive at their own abasement and forge the fetters that bind them? Ah! surely not? There can be no freedom for them where Superstition reigns, because this tyrant is an autocrat who will accept of no dictation, but who mercilessly dictates. Superstition has asserted, proclaimed, and enforced the subjection of woman, and enjoined its continuance in obedience to the precepts of the Bible, falsely called the Word of God.

Abominable falsehood! The Bible is the Word of Man, and the God therein is this creature deified. Into the lips of that Deity man has breathed his ignorant thoughts and selfish desires, chief of which was the possession of woman as a slave. How could this be enforced but by making her believe that she was the offspring of a male rib and the first to

transgress the commands of God, wherefore the mere chip of the former, and justly subjected by the latter to the condition of a disinherited? Disinherited Woman! Through long ages your eyes have been bound, and the light has not shone therein. Tear off the bandages which keep them in darkness, and see the truth for your own salvation and for that of your children and descendants. While Bible precept is held to be divine, there is no *raison d'être* for the rights of woman, seeing that she is denied such thereby. But once it is plainly seen that Bible precept is man-made and not God-made, then the barrier, so long held up by Falsehood's props against woman's freedom, must go down with a crash, by reason of its own rotten and decayed structure.

It is for men to give Woman freedom, even as it is her bounden duty to demand it as her right. Let Reason be her guide and Truth her beacon. Then men shall cease to be the sons of slaves, and through their free mothers inherit the glorious birthright of true liberty. Once the origin of humanity is realised by all, Superstition must die, for Knowledge will never submit to Ignorance and Falsehood, who are the parents of Superstition.

In the name of all that is noble, upright, courageous, and pure, I appeal for the destruction of this tyrannic fraud. Made by man, it has proved his worst enemy, for it has degraded woman and, through her, pulled him down. In plain, forcible language *The Religion of Woman* tells its own sad tale. Written by a man, it unfolds to her the truth, and invites her to revolt against her task-master. Many there are who will do so, but yet many more, I fear, whose eyes have lost the power to see by long deprivation of the light, who will not.

For these I plead to men. Assault the borders of their Land of Bondage, and bear them into the Land of Freedom. Then shall Freethought take possession of their souls, for the taskmaster who oppressed them will no longer overmaster them with protected power. Once Superstition dies, Intellect shall reign. It will need all the forces of Reason to accomplish this much-desired end. Unreason looms large upon the world, a giant in size and mighty in magnitude and power. Nevertheless, it is not always the vast armies that have prevailed against well-organised and disciplined small ones. Freethought is the David whose sling must cast the stone of Truth that shall strike the Goliath of Superstition down and give freedom and happiness to the world.

Of what avail life without these adjuncts to joy? Is the cry of Misery eternally to go on? Is this Misery, the only child which Superstition has produced, to live for ever? If the man-made God has made his creator so wretched, is it not time this latter deposed him and raised in his place one who shall bring about the Brotherhood of Man?

Yes. It is time, and this humanity must recognise. But, before it can enthrone the true God, it must banish the false. To accomplish this, it must realise the bondage in which the latter has placed the fountain-head of life, and this both men and women will do if they earnestly and thoughtfully study *The Religion of Woman*.

FLORENCE DIXIE.

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# THE RELIGION OF WOMAN

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## CHAPTER I.

### WOMAN AND THE CHURCHES

THE visitor to York Minster often lingers with an unexpected interest in tracing the remains of structures that have preceded the present magnificent church. You descend into the crypt, and examine the massive lower walls and columns from which the cathedral takes its upward flight. There your architectural interest is thrust aside for the moment by a curious discovery. In dim recesses, just peeping out from the swelling masonry, you descry the foundations of an earlier structure; then, if you look more closely, the traces of a yet earlier temple, until the mind runs back along a period of religious history that far out-distances the Christian era. As in the dust of some most ancient town, you read into the thin strata long periods of the social and religious life of humanity. At this spot for thousands of years, apparently, the inhabitants of the historic place have met for worship, the religious spirit enduring amid a hundred changes of form and vesture. Human sacrifices have been displaced by the symbolic sacrifice of the Host, and this in turn has yielded to the service of song and light. Druid priests have given place to shaven monks and gorgeously-attired Catholic priests, and

these again in the roll of ages to the sober-clad clergy of the Church of England. The costumes, the habits, the houses of the people, have not more changed than their religious forms and practices. Each Church, each priesthood, in its turn thought it expressed the final and absolute truth. But the time-spirit has sealed the lips of hierarchy after hierarchy. New gospels have come from beyond the seas, or flashed in the hearts of the people's prophets, and, with scorn and disdain, the old forms have been swept into the crypt. Religion grows and advances as humanity grows and advances.

Enter the minster now on some quiet evening and see the handful of worshippers kneeling in prayer, soothed with the familiar confidence. The law of growth that is so vividly illustrated in the crypt has no message for them. They look up in pride at the stately fabric of the minster, and see a promise of finality in its beauty and solidity. The waves might shatter and sweep away the frail religious structures that had gone before, but they fall impotently before this building and the religion it stands for. Yet, if they would look more closely and less partially, how many



indications they would find that the law is at work now, not less, but more, assiduously than ever! Look at the empty niches, from which the statues of Mary and the saints have been cast with a cry of idolatry. Look at the roof, blackened with the fumes of incense and candles that have been extinguished. The religion of the present worshippers is almost as different from that of the mediæval worshippers who built the cathedral as this in turn differed from that of their predecessors. The minster itself is an eloquent witness to the law of growth.

But perhaps *now* the term is reached, and the religious form perfect and final. Look into the faces of the crowds that roam about the minster with a pagan admiration, and inquire into the thoughts of the people of York. Read Mr. Seebohm Rowntree's book on the moral and social condition of York. With all its prestige, its endowments, its æsthetic charm, its power of social aggregation, its devoted ministry, its alertness to the times, the Church which the minster represents is losing its hold on the nation. The majority of the people now pass by its open doors, and refuse to share in any form of worship whatever. Once, many ages ago, the people merely gathered under the open sky about a rude stone altar, on which the priest offered the tragic sacrifice. Then little sanctuaries were raised to shelter the altar and the images of the gods. Then the structure grew into a temple that would contain the worshippers themselves. The little temples have grown into huge churches and cathedrals, redolent with the scent of flowers and incense, or ringing with the sound of hymn and psalm. Now they in turn are being neglected.

For York is but a type of the fortune of the Christian Church everywhere to-day. The increasing neglect of worship is visible on the surface of life, but there have been several careful inquiries with a view to accurate determination. Enumerations have been made at such places as Dumfries, Liverpool, Chester, London, Paris, and New York. In spite of the immense differences in the character of these places, the result was much the same in all. There is a considerable lapse from the Churches. No town to-day is small enough, or sleepy enough, to escape the new spirit. The Bishop of London—of a city where three-fourths of the population avoid the churches and chapels—tells his clergy (as he did in a recent address) “not to live in a fool's paradise,” but realise the gravity of the situation. The Bishop of Worcester, speaking for a rural district, equally deplors the decay of allegiance to the Church. A distinguished French bishop (Mgr. Turinaz, of Nancy) writes that “the Church is perishing in France year by year.” A well-known defender of the faith—and, therefore, an optimist by profession—the Rev. F. Ballard, tells an interviewer in *Great Thoughts* that “the outlook is a serious one.” Another official optimist, the Rev. Rhondda Williams, writes that “already the cultured laity on the one hand and the bulk of the democracy on the other lie entirely outside the Churches.”

This is a very serious and interesting social phenomenon, and it has several aspects that are worthy of careful study. One might ask whether this decay of the existing religious forms is continuous and progressive, and what is likely to be the moral issue of it for the nation, or what further religious form, if any, is likely to

emerge out of the present chaos. I shall have something to say on these questions in later chapters ; but my chief purpose is to discuss the attitude taken up by women in the present phase of religious development, and I turn at once to that subject.

The most careful inquiry yet made into the change of thought we are considering is that which was conducted by Mr. Mudie-Smith and a large body of trained assistants. All the flippant objections raised against this investigation by the religious bodies which suffered most by the publication of its results may be totally disregarded. The inquiry was almost ideally exact and impartial. It erred a little on the side of loyalty when the time came to estimate how many people *might* attend church ; but I am mainly concerned with its ascertained facts rather than its conjectures. It was controlled by a London journal with a pronounced religious following. As given in Mr. Mudie-Smith's book, the general result is that, out of a total population of 6,240,336 souls, only 1,514,025 attend church or chapel ; when we allow for the proportion of these who attend morning *and* evening, we get a total of about a million and a quarter worshippers, out of six millions and a quarter. As all the religious leaders who were asked to write about it said, this is a serious situation. In the words of the superintendent of the census, a religious man : " Four persons out of every five, not dwelling in institutions, are either careless or hostile as regards public worship."<sup>1</sup> The less careful enumerations of church-goers which have been made in other towns gave, on the average, about the

same result. Further, we are able to compare this result with that of a census taken in 1886 by the editor of the *British Weekly*. London had then a population of 3,816,483, and of these 1,167,312 attended church. The same area has now a population of 4,500,000, yet only 1,003,361 attend any place of worship. As the latter figure includes some 50,000 Jews, Spiritists, Ethicists, and all kinds of people outside of the great Christian bodies, we must deduct these for the purpose of comparison. In spite of the immense increase of the population and the very remarkable stimulation of Church-work during recent years, there has been a positive loss of 200,000 worshippers ; the real loss is very considerably higher when we look to the increase of the population.

One of the most noticeable features of this census, and of similar calculations elsewhere, is that women have remained attached to the Churches in a far higher proportion than men. Thus, for Greater London we find an attendance (apart from the Jews) of 372,264 men and 607,257 women (that is, without deducting 38 per cent. for double attendances). It is important to note, too, that the higher proportion of women is much more conspicuous in the older Churches—the Anglican and Roman Catholic—and in cultured districts. The Church of England has 153,365 men to 292,710 women. Taking three districts that may be considered to represent the better educated classes, we find this result : In Marylebone the Church of England had 4,051 men to 10,891 women ; the Church of Rome, 1,161 men to 3,026 women. In Paddington the Church of England had 3,392 men and 9,237 women ; the Church of Rome, 408 men and 1,254 women. In Kensington the Church of

<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Life of London*, p. 18.

England had 5,362 men and 14,577 women; the Church of Rome, 1,866 men and 5,009 women. In all these cases 38 per cent. must be deducted for "twicers." When we descend to individual churches, this feature is still more striking. At the Brompton Oratory there were 267 men and 1,105 women; at the Carmelites' Church, 276 men and 807 women; at the Pro-Cathedral, 237 men and 701 women; at the Holy Trinity, Brompton, there were 160 men and 880 women (the Bishop of London preaching there on the occasion, if I remember rightly); at Christ's Church, Lancaster Gate, 249 men and 1,034 women.

It would be idle to question that these figures have a significance, and it would seem that every thoughtful woman should be anxious to discover what that meaning is. It is not a question of England alone. That distinguished woman-worker in the States, Miss Susan B. Anthony, tells us (*Arena*, May, 1897) that women form "from two-thirds to three-fourths of the membership of the Churches of America." Jules Simon said of France, even in his day, that "woman had lost the force of religion—not that she was irreligious herself, but her husband was so, almost irremediably." M. Taine, at a later date, gave some statistics. In 1890 there were 2,000,000 people in Paris. Of these (on the authority of an eminent ecclesiastic) only 100,000 made their Easter duty—a very strict test of membership for Catholics—and these included four women to one man. In other words, on a very reliable test, only one woman in twelve or thirteen, but only one man in fifty, owned allegiance to the Church at Paris in 1890. In the French provinces one woman in four and one man

in twelve was found to be a real believer. That the situation has not improved is very clear from the fact that some 800 priests have left their Church in France alone during the last five years.

We have here a very well-defined social fact, and one that should be of the deepest interest to women themselves. The present controversy about the differences in power or quality between man and woman is largely rendered tiresome by the lack of exact data to proceed on. In this matter of religion it is established that woman is far more conservative than man. The proportion of women in the Churches is vastly greater than their proportion in the general population. Why is this? The question cannot be without interest to any thoughtful woman. We might, indeed, give a stronger expression to the fact, for few women will doubt that many of the men who do frequent the churches only do so under the pressure of professional interest or social or domestic influence. But we may be content with the sufficiently abnormal figures I have quoted. It is time for women to confront the facts of their religious life seriously. If their attachment to religion is well founded, it will only be strengthened by examination. But if women hold aloof improperly from the greatest thought-movement of their time, they will endanger the chances of that intellectual respect which the world is at last yielding them.

Women who are taking their part in the world's work to-day are aware how frequently their claim for their sex is evaded, or even openly rejected, with a vague charge that they are reactionary, or thoughtlessly conservative. Now, there are several obvious arguments which it would be possible for them to

put forward in justification of their conservatism in the matter of religion. It will not be urged that they have a finer perception of the intellectual evidences for Christianity, so that I shall not need in this work to discuss those evidences in themselves. But probably one of three reasons will be alleged by the woman who would justify the greater loyalty of her sex to the faith that is passing from our midst. It may be said—as it is widely believed—that the Christian Church has a peculiar title to the gratitude of woman for the share it has had in liberating her from the tyranny or the contempt or ill-usage of man. It may, again, be urged that woman's more emotional and refined nature affords greater hospitality to the religious sense or instinct than does that of man; or it may be felt that woman's deeper realisation, as mother, of the moral need of ideas in the training of children impels her to retain, as much as possible, the Church-influence which has so long been the only agency for the formation of character. It is unquestionable that large numbers of women do deliberately retain their faith on these grounds, and do not merely listlessly acquiesce in things as they are. There is a vague feeling abroad that woman's greater attachment to religion has both utility and dignity. I propose in this little work to examine carefully these and other apologies for woman's position in the Churches.

Though I leave to a later chapter the subject of the religious instinct and its fuller development in woman, let me say at once that there is a natural conservatism in her which is at once entitled to man's respect, and yet should be an object of suspicion to herself. Mr. Havelock Ellis has devoted a chapter of

his *Man and Woman* to the subject. He says that woman is proved to have a greater general organic stability than man. Life has reached the high level it occupies in us to-day by a long and arduous struggle, as is now fully admitted. In this struggle a tendency to variation on the part of living things has been essential to any advance; and it has been equally essential to have a tendency to stability for the purpose of fixing the good steps won in the ascent, and check erratic wandering. Somehow, the tendency to variation has found embodiment more particularly in man, while the restricting tendency has been more absorbed by woman. This is probably a wise distribution (though a fresh arrangement of the needs of the world may very well claim an alteration). My only point here is that it should make men less impatient of women's conservatism; while the consciousness of having such an organic bias should make woman more careful as to *what* she conserves, more resolute to use her reason and judgment on the opinions she hands to her children. It is at the same time proved—if scientific determination of it were necessary—that woman has greater suggestibility (or is more receptive of outward influence), keener affectibility (or emotions), and less independence. It is, of course, an open question how far this is due to nature and how far merely to education.

All this will find a closer application later on. For the moment I will only mention one or two facts which indicate how it works out in the province of religion. Thus, at the most intellectual period of the history of women, in classical Greece, there were great numbers of women philosophers. But of those whose names have come down to



us thirty-four distinguished themselves in the Pythagorean philosophy (the most spiritual and mystic of the Greek schools), while there were only three or four in any other school, and only one among the Cynics. So with regard to the history of religion. Mr. Havelock Ellis found that, out of 600 sects in a dictionary of religions (which he calls "the most painful page in the history of humanity"), only *seven* had been founded by women. These seven sects, moreover, were all Christian, obscure, fairly recent, and of a mystic character; and their founders were all of a more or less morbid nature. Such facts as these show that woman has been a follower rather than a pioneer, and that she follows most easily along the line of her own temperament. It is surely, therefore, needful that she should examine more rigorously the part she plays in the world as a conservative force.

But it will be more convenient to take at a later stage of this inquiry the question of woman's religious instinct and of the necessity for religious influence. In the way of all inquiry, or, at least, prejudicing every inquiry by the plea of gratitude and loyalty which it seems to impose on woman, is the theory that Christianity has rendered considerable service to her cause. This claim must be examined before we proceed. On the surface of the matter, it is obvious that Christianity *has* in several ways aided in the liberation of woman. A very imposing case is made by those clerical writers who press the subject on behalf of the Churches. But few are ignorant to-day how narrow and self-complacent ecclesiastical history has always been; how it has only glanced back at pre-Christian times for the purpose of discovering their errors and defects, while it has, with a narrow idea of loyalty, distorted the facts of its own

peculiar province. It may be that, when the whole of the facts are known, woman may have to modify her so common opinion about the effect of the coming of Christianity upon her fortunes.

Take, for instance, the position of woman at these two very different stages of human history—in ancient Egypt and in modern England and the United States. We have so rich a collection of remains of the ancient Egyptian civilisation, and so careful and industrious a scholarship has been set to interpret them, that we can with confidence reconstruct the life of woman in that country 2,000 years before Christ was born, and even at a date which Christian tradition had named for the beginning of the world. Two thousand years before the time of Christ—and, if we went farther back, we should find the position of woman more rather than less honourable—woman was more free and more honoured in Egypt than she is in any country of the world to-day. She was the mistress of the house, her husband being merely, as Flinders Petrie says, "a sort of boarder, or visitor, who had to keep up the establishment," or, as M. Maspéro puts it, "a privileged guest." She inherited equally with her brothers, and had full control of her property. She could go where she liked, or speak with whom she liked. She was "juridically the equal of man," says M. Paturet, "having the same rights and being treated in the same fashion"; and the same authority observes that it was not as mother, but as woman, as a being equal in human dignity, that she was thus honoured. There was polygamy in theory, but the first wife was generally able to exact conditions in her marriage-contract which effectually prevented it. She could bring actions, and even plead

in the courts. She practised the art of medicine. As priestess she had authority in the temples. Frequently as queen she was the highest in the land. In the earlier times her marriage was probably indissoluble; at all events, the inscriptions show, says M. Maspéro, that she remained to the end of life "the beloved of her husband and the mistress of the house." "Make glad her heart during the time that thou hast" was the traditional advice to the husband. Even when she proved unfaithful—and the Egyptians had a high ideal of domestic relations 6,000 years ago—he was told: "Be kind to her for a season, send her not away, let her have food to eat."

Now pass swiftly from this remote picture of dignity and justice to a nation which represents 1,800 years of culture under Christian influence. I take the nearest concise statement to my hand—a description of the position of woman in enlightened Boston about 1850 (under English Common Law)<sup>1</sup>:—

Woman could not hold any property, either earned or inherited. If unmarried, she was obliged to place it in the hands of a trustee, to whose will she was subject. If she contemplated marriage, and desired to call her property her own, she was forced by law to make a contract with her intended husband by which she gave up all title or claim to it. A woman, either married or unmarried, could hold no office of trust or power. She was not a person. She was not recognised as a citizen. She was not a factor in the human family. She was not a unit, but a zero in the sum of civilisation. .... The status of a married woman was little better than that of a domestic servant. By the English Common Law her husband was her lord and master. He had the sole custody of her person and of her minor children. He could punish her "with a stick no bigger than his thumb," and she could not

complain against him. .... The common law of the State [Massachusetts] held man and wife to be one person, but that person was the husband. He could by will deprive her of every part of his property, and also of what had been her own before marriage. He was the owner of all her real estate and her earnings. The wife could make no contract and no will, nor, without her husband's consent, dispose of the legal interest of her real estate. .... She did not own a rag of her clothing. She had no personal rights, and could hardly call her soul her own. Her husband could steal her children, rob her of her clothing, neglect to support the family: she had no legal redress. If a wife earned money by her labour, the husband could claim the pay as his share of the proceeds.

So painful a contrast as this in two civilisations, one of which long preceded the coming of Christ, while the other is a high type of Christian culture, must surely give ground for reflection. It is clear that the notion held by so many religious women—that their cause languished until the coming to power of Christianity, and then entered upon a grateful period of advance—is greatly in error. One need not be surprised at the error. It has long been the custom to judge pre-Christian civilisations by the lowest depths they ever touched, while the application of such a test to Christianity itself was bitterly resented. The result has been a wholly romantic idea that the world lay in the shadow of death until the first century of the Christian era, and then at last the pale dawn of a higher idealism broke upon it. This is a myth, and a very mischievous one. It is particularly foolish in relation to the progress of woman's cause. The growth of justice in this or any other section of life is not for a moment comparable to the dawn of a new day. Rather has it been like the slow advance of a tide up an uneven beach. Here it has run quickly ahead by a pre-fashioned

<sup>1</sup> I am quoting it from vol. iii. (p. 290) of Mrs. Cady Stanton's *History of Women's Suffrage*.

channel; there it has found banks and obstacles, and has lingered impatiently. Did Christian thought smooth the way for it, or impede it? The contrast of pagan Egypt and Christian Boston more than justifies the raising of the question.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE WOMAN OF PAGAN CULTURE

RELIGIOUS-MINDED people who are convinced that Christianity brought a deferred hope to womankind have a vague notion that she was degraded and enslaved under the Greek and Roman systems, whatever may have been her position elsewhere, and that from this condition Christianity set out to rescue her. It is important to look more closely into this than the ecclesiastical historian is wont to do. The time is, happily, passing away when men and women feared to be deprived of their conventional shudder over the sins of Athens and Rome, and resented every effort to redeem or alleviate the character of those whose civilisation we barbarians inherited. To-day there is a feeling that it is better to err by generosity in our estimate of the dignity and promise of human nature. One need not ask so much as this. A careful inquiry into the condition of Greek and Roman thought as to the position of woman at the time when paganism yielded to Christianity will sufficiently answer my purpose.

I have spoken of the condition of woman in ancient Egypt. This was, it is true, an exceptional civilisation in its treatment of women; but you will find broad gleams of justice in many other parts of the world long before, or wide apart from, Christian influence. One

high authority, M. Revillout, tells us that he finds woman held in equal dignity with man in the earliest periods of Chaldaic and Assyrian civilisation. At a later date, Mr. Lecky says, we find that among the ancient Aryans and the Brahmins woman is the worker, and is subject to her husband, but he is religiously enjoined to bear in mind all that he obtains through her. The ancient laws of India forbade the making of a marriage gift to the father of the bride, on the ground that he must not sell his child. In distant Japan women were freely honoured until the adoption of Chinese ideas. Several distinguished Mikados and chieftains were women. During the classic period of their literature (about 800 to 1186 of the Christian era—that is to say, just at the time when women were at the lowest point of legal degradation in Christian Europe) “a very large and important part of the best literature Japan has produced was written by women,” as Mr. Astor says in his history of Japanese literature. The position which woman occupied among the Germanic tribes, and which she retained to an extent in England for some time after its conversion, is very well known. Monogamy was almost universal; and not only does Tacitus contrast their general chastity with that of the Romans

of his day, but Salvianus, a Christian priest, represents them as equally superior to his own Christian contemporaries. Women were "honoured by the Germans as something sacred and prophetic," says Tacitus. They were often consulted about war or other important tribal affairs. Among the Goths, and some other tribes, the daughter inherited equally with the son; and the wife retained full control over the husband's wedding gift to her. An ancient tradition declared that Odin had charged them to honour woman as a visible deity. Boadicea is a familiar illustration that among our Celtic parents, too, woman was able to play an important part. In fact, some writers have held that all civilisation begins with the rule of the mothers in a community; but, though there are very extensive traces of a primitive matriarchate, it is by no means admitted to have been universal.

It is important to bear these facts in mind, because European civilisation has drawn upon all these earlier polities, under the direction of Christianity, for its system, and we may pertinently ask how these good features came to be lost. But my more particular task is to determine the fortune of woman under the Greek and Roman systems, from which modern Europe more clearly emerged. Here, emphatically, we find a growth that must be likened to the irregular onrush of the tide rather than the measured break of the day. There has been no steady advance, and most certainly no sudden illumination at the appearance of Christianity. The real betterment of woman's lot has been strangely tortuous and unromantic.

With her position in Greece we need not delay long, as the Greek civilisation was for the most part absorbed in the

Roman. At the very earliest period of Greek history we find a concern to treat woman justly and honourably. Polygamy was generally abandoned. Schaible tells us that a Greek legend spoke of the abolition of polygamy by Cecrops in prehistoric times. It is, at all events, quite clear that they had abandoned it at a time when the Hebrews maintained it in a form peculiarly insulting and unjust to woman. At an early period, too, the gift to the father of the bride was changed into a gift *from* her father, which made a considerable difference in her moral position. Later, in the Homeric period and the subsequent age of the great tragedians, woman holds an honoured though a restricted position. Moreover, her cry for complete justice is growing louder. Listen to it, for instance, as it is voiced in the *Medea* of Euripides. Then came the age of the great moralists, of Plato and Aristotle, and we find a distinct perception of the injustice of the Greek social order, in which the courtesan alone is free and the married woman is confined to the home and uneducated; though legally, we must remember, the Greek woman was capable of all civic and many juridical acts, without her husband's intervention. Plato, who seems not to have consistently denounced the prejudice of his time (and we can forgive some hesitation when we study the classic examples of Greek womanhood), said, nevertheless, in his *Republic* (I quote from Schaible):—

This sex, which we keep in obscurity and domestic work, is it not fitted for nobler and more elevated functions? Are there no instances of courage, wisdom, advance in all the arts? Mayhap these qualities have a certain debility, and are lower than in ourselves. But does it follow that they are, therefore, useless to the country? No, nature bestows no talent with a view to sterility; and the great art of the

lawgiver is to make use of all the forces which nature confers.

Aristotle, too, though he rarely breaks away from the conventional feeling of his time on this subject, is not without a contribution to the advance. He says in one place that the Greeks are superior to the barbarians in that their wives are not their slaves, but their helpmates; and in another place, Mr. Lecky says, he clearly demands of husbands the same fidelity that they exact of their wives. This marks an important advance in the application of moral principle to the relation of the sexes.

Then came the conquest of Greece by Rome and the distortion of its natural growth; but if we follow patiently the tangled threads of its moral development, we find a continuous growth of the ideal of justice. In the period of disorder, of enfeeblement, and of dependence that followed, we cannot expect to find an equable progress of the cause of woman in Greece. Yet when we come to Plutarch, a Greek moralist of the early years of the Christian era, we find that the sense of justice to woman is still growing. Plutarch openly claims for woman a mental and moral equality with man, and a perfect reciprocity of their obligations. He claims, in particular, that woman shall be equally educated with man. Greek philosophy was clearly preparing the way for a full correction of the undue pressure of the social system on woman; and Plutarch, unlike Plato, was not resisting, but voicing, the cultured feeling of his time. Thus, when Christianity was first brought to Greece, the age of woman's oppression was virtually over, and a clear promise of a more enlightened social order can be discovered. Fitly enough, the Greek philosophy and ethic, now transferred to

Alexandria, came to a close, in the fifth century, with the noble and gifted Hypatia, whose real greatness of mind and character Kingsley has so artfully concealed behind the figure of his charming but frail young heroine. Hypatia, a woman of perfect and solid culture, of formed and resolute character, of great civic dignity and importance, is the last outcome of the growing recognition of woman's dignity in Greece. She stands out amid a darkening and reactionary age as a final reminder of what Greek culture would soon have done for woman.

Into the development of woman's position in Rome we must inquire more closely. It is here most precisely that the effect of the coming to power of Christianity will be felt, and where it has to be chiefly appraised. The majority of religious people know two things, and little else, about Roman life and thought in this connection. They know that in the stern, puritanic, earlier days of the Republic woman was the slave of her father until she married, and then the slave of her husband for the rest of her life; and they know that at the time of the coming of Christianity woman (and man, too) led a life of general and, in some respects, sordid licentiousness and cruelty. They vaguely ascribe the disappearance of both evils to Christian influence, and so look with suspicion on every proposal to subvert it. This is a familiar pulpit account of the moral history of humanity. It is a complete distortion of the facts.

It is true that in the early days woman was under the absolute control of father or husband, and that they had the power of life and death over her.<sup>2</sup> But in most

<sup>2</sup> I would refer the horrified Englishwoman who reads of this power of life and death to an article in the *Contemporary Review*, December,

other respects the Romans treated their women with far higher consideration than the Hebrews. The Roman religion, like that of the Egyptians, did not preach the inferiority of the female. Revillout and other scholars find proof that in the earliest accessible stages of Roman history the relation of the sexes was one of great humanity and concord. Monogamy was strictly enforced. Valerius Maximus affirms that divorce was unknown for 520 years after the foundation of Rome. Throughout the period of the Republic, in fact, woman was in a far better position than in Greece; Nepos claims that his own civilisation is higher than the Roman in that respect. She ate at the same table, lived in the *atrium* (hall) of the house instead of being relegated to the *gynæceum* (women's quarters), went out to dine, or to the theatre or temple, and was treated with the highest respect in the street. "The Roman matron," says the French biographer of St. Ambrose, "was the first model of the Christian woman." The classic portraits of Roman women are among the finest of all time. And, though they were excluded from political work, they held one office, that of Vestal Virgin, which was in some regards higher than the Consulate. The elder Cato, a type of the older Roman, said: "A man who beats his wife and his children lays impious hands on that which is most holy and most sacred in the world."

But a momentous change came over the fortune of women about the close of the Republic, and it is this that we have chiefly to appreciate. It might be ex-

1899, by Signora Melegari. From this it appears that this custom is really not so far removed from our own day. "In the south of Italy, especially, a woman may suffer death at the hands of the males of her family, and public opinion be not in the least moved to reprobation thereby."

pressed in the statement that woman gained the liberty she had coveted and lost the moral dignity she had borne. After the end of the Punic wars the despotic authority of the father and husband began to wane. This authority had been transferred from the father to the husband at marriage—that is to say, in the more solemn form of marriage known as the *confarreatio*. The radical change which now took place was that the stricter form of marriage fell into disuse, and a laxer form became general. In this way the husband lost the stern power which the *confarreatio* had given him, and the woman found a path to complete liberty. By the time of the beginning of Christianity woman had attained a liberty and distinction which she has not even yet completely regained. Emperors set their wives beside them on the throne, and the wives of the patri- cians took the hint. They formed a *conventus matronarum* (a club), with a meeting-house of their own on the Quirinal for the discussion of their public affairs. They owned considerable property, and at times lent money to their husbands—at more than shrewd interest. We find the wives of generals in camp with their husbands; and on the walls of Pompeii we discover election addresses signed by women in support of certain candidates. They had great wealth, considerable culture, a large visiting circle (including male friends), and complete control of the slaves, freedmen, and clients of the house. In the provinces they sometimes held high municipal offices.

Sir Henry Maine, whose chapter on this subject in his *Ancient Law* should be read by every woman, points out that, if it had not been for the discovery of the writings of Gaius (a Roman jurist

who wrote about 130-180 A.D.), we should scarcely have been able to realise at all the force of the older law. "It had fallen into complete discredit, and was verging on extinction," he says (p. 154).

The great juriconsult himself scouts the popular apology offered for it in the mental inferiority of the female sex, and a considerable part of his volume is taken up with descriptions of the numerous expedients, some of them displaying extraordinary ingenuity, which the Roman lawyers had devised for enabling women to defeat the ancient rules. Led by their theory of Natural Law, the juriconsults had evidently at this time assumed the equality of the sexes as a principle of their code of equity.

Thus, long before there could be any question of Christian influence on Roman society or Roman law, woman had attained in the Empire a position of almost complete liberty and distinction. The woman of the wealthier class had practically no grievances, and she was conscious of a power to secure whatever further ambition she might entertain. It is, therefore, wholly absurd to speak as if Christianity had delivered her from the despotism of earlier Roman law. But we must go further. The Christian Church must tell us how it came about that, whereas we find woman in Rome 1,800 years ago on the eve of complete independence, we have had to fight the battle all over again in the nineteenth century; how it came about that in the intervening 1,800 years, and particularly during that period when the power of the Church was paramount—the Middle Ages—woman fell to a lower position in law than she had ever occupied under the Greek or Roman system.

Let me approach the subject once more under cover of the great authority of Sir Henry Maine. After describing the degree of liberty won by the Roman

women, he goes on (p. 156): "Christianity tended somewhat from the very first to narrow this remarkable liberty." This opposition on the part of Christianity rested on religious and ethical grounds. I have explained how the new liberty of woman in Rome curiously sprang from the substitution of a laxer form of marriage, with a greater facility of divorce, for the old and stricter form. To this change Christianity was bound to oppose itself. But it went on to fatal excesses under the influence of its "passion for asceticism," as I will explain in the next chapter. "The latest Roman law," says Sir Henry, "so far as it is touched by the Constitutions of the Christian Emperors, bears some marks of a reaction against the liberal doctrines of the great Antonine juriconsults"; and he attributes it to "the prevalent state of religious feeling" that, in the formation of mediæval jurisprudence by the fusion of Roman law with the customs of the barbarians, the legislation of Europe "absorbed much more than usual of those rules concerning the position of woman which belong peculiarly to an imperfect civilisation." The Justinian Code had generally acted as a corrective of the barbaric customs, but

the chapter of law relating to married women was for the most part read by the light, not of Roman, but of Canon law, which in no one particular departs so widely from the spirit of the secular jurisprudence as in the view it takes of the relations created by marriage. This was in part inevitable, since *no society which preserves any tincture of Christian institutions is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the middle Roman law*; but the proprietary disabilities of married females stand on quite a different basis from their personal incapacities, and it is by the tendency of their doctrines to keep alive and consolidate the former that the expositors of the Canon law have deeply injured civilisation.



He then points out that those legislations which have kept the longest and the strictest in touch with Canon law have been the most harsh in their treatment of women, and that the English law relating to married women is one of the most painful instances of this.

This is a very grave indictment of the action of the Christian Church by a distinguished legal authority; it is a prosaic statement of the facts that must outweigh any number of sermons or apologetic works. Nor can relief be sought in the idea that priestly legislators framed this iniquitous Canon law in defiance of the real teaching of the Christian religion. The truth is, as I will show, that it is the explicit and emphatic teaching of the great Christian leaders that brought about this unhappy result. Woman was thrust back into the *gynæceum* by the official action of the Church, under the clear direction of its most sacred writings.

But before we pass on to consider the development of the Christian attitude towards woman and her aspirations, we must consider the second fallacy of which I spoke. Let us grant, it is said, that the sternness of the older Roman law and custom had been moderated, if not abolished, and that woman had won liberty and independence. But you admit, it is urged, that in gaining liberty she had lost her moral dignity; and it was more important to restore this than to secure the permanence of her independence, with all its abuses. Christianity came into a world that seethed with vice, and called for moral rather than material redemption. That is an arguable position; only people should be consistent, and not claim that Christianity emancipated woman when they mean that, on however lofty grounds, it

neglected—nay, contemned—the greatest chance ever offered of emancipating her. But the chief defect of this new position is that it is a mere travesty of the moral and religious history of the empire. Women who wish to know the truth as to what Christianity has or has not done for them will do well to read this page of history very carefully.

In the first place, one cannot protest too frequently against the fallacy of judging a people by the lowest depth they ever touched. It is stupid or dishonest in a high degree to describe the worst vices of the Augustan age, and then say *this* is paganism. If future ages are to test the era of Christian influence in this way, it will go ill with it. Religious writers talk, for instance, of the 6th Satire of Juvenal as an illustration of "pagan morals." It would be just as fair and logical to take the *Liber Gomorrhæicus* of Cardinal Peter Damian (a far more terrible exposure of the morals of the clergy in the eleventh century) as an illustration of "Christian morals." It would be just as fair to judge our own nation by the degraded condition of the people in, for instance, the eighteenth century; when, says Sir Walter Besant, "for drunkenness, brutality, and ignorance the Englishmen of the baser kind reached the lowest depth ever reached by civilised man." If we look about us, we shall see a hundred warnings of the folly—a folly of which hardly a single religious writer on the subject is not guilty—of selecting the darkest shades of Roman life and representing these as typical. Indeed, I could go further, and claim that these shades have been greatly exaggerated in the comparison with our own time. The vagueness with which we necessarily discuss these matters lends itself to such

interested exaggeration. The truth is that some of the worst vices scourged by Juvenal at Rome are just as prevalent in London or Paris to-day.

However, it is no part of my plan to institute comparisons. I would rather direct attention to this undoubted but little appreciated fact—that, long before Christianity became powerful enough to exercise the slightest influence on the morals of Rome, there was a very remarkable improvement. Christianity had not converted two per cent. of the Empire by the reign of Constantine. It was not in a position to affect the general character until near the close of the fourth century. But by that time there had been a considerable change in the pagan character. A number of regenerating influences were at work in the Empire. Those who imagine that Christianity was the sole spiritual force in operation at that time are strangely ignorant of the period. Two philosophies and three religions, besides Christianity, were working to restore the moral dignity of the Roman people. Greek philosophy had, as I said, been transferred from Athens to Alexandria, and there it took almost the character and fervour of a religion. It had an appreciable influence, in this form of neo-Platonism, on the moral temper of the age. The Emperor Julian was a follower of it. Saint Augustine and several others found it the ante-chamber to Christianity. Its last great teacher, the brilliant Hypatia, shows that its spirit was one not only of abstract justice, but also of justice to woman. On the other hand, the Stoic philosophy was even more effective, both in improving the general moral temper of the Empire and in securing justice for the woman and the slave. Its chief

Roman writers, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, are teachers for all time. It had completely altered the tone of Roman society before the middle of the second century. The vicious luxury and gluttony of the Augustan age, the crucifixion of slaves, the licentiousness of the emancipated women, and other disorders of the "pagan" world, were healed by purely pagan influences.

Renan, glancing from the age of Marcus Aurelius to the later development of European history, exclaimed that "human life was suspended for a thousand years." Certainly, in respect of the particular question we are considering, the plaint was perfectly just. Clearly, what was needed, as far as woman's cause was concerned, was an agency that should not destroy, but purify and consolidate, the new liberty. It was based, to an important extent, on the new laxity of morals. The serious task of the moralist was to transfer it to a sounder foundation. This is what the Christian Church disdained to do, and what the pagan moralists were doing. Seneca spoke, like Plutarch, of the equality of man and woman in moral dignity and moral responsibility. Antoninus Pius embodied in one of his judgments the opinion that the husband was just as strictly bound to be faithful as the wife, and it is given as a legal axiom by Ulpianus. We have seen that another jurisconsult, Gaius, sharply rejected the notion of woman's inferiority. Dion Chrysostom demanded the suppression by law of prostitution. All the neo-Platonists insisted strongly on pre-matrimonial chastity. As a French Christian writer, M. Thamin, says: "The ancient wisdom had taken on a new and quite Christian form."

But the efforts of the philosophic moralists were aided among the people by three religions which sought, no less eagerly than Christianity, to regenerate the Empire. The cult of Isis, the cult of Mithra, and the Manichean religion were spreading even more quickly, and with no less moral effect, than the Christian religion. Most of the Roman senators who made the last stand about the year 380 against the new Church belonged to one or other of these cults. And these religions, introduced from abroad, tended to help the settlement of the "woman-question" of that time. The cult of Isis brought to the women of Rome, not only a pure if not ascetic ideal, not only the great moral prestige of conceiving the Deity in female form, but also a relic of the old Egyptian tradition as regards woman. The cults of Mithra and Mani brought equally elevated ideals of conduct; St. Jerome scornfully told his Christian followers that, when he met a woman of sedate and spiritual appearance at Rome, he knew at once that she was a Manichean. They embodied some of the best moral traditions of Persia. In Manicheism women formed an important part of the administrative system.

These religions took deep root in the Roman world. By the time Christianity came into the position to exercise a widespread moral influence, they had already

half accomplished the work of regeneration, and not until the thirteenth century did it advance any further. The last group of "pagans" which we find opposing the advance of Christianity was a group of high-minded men and women. In the centre of it we find the last great Roman, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, and his equally distinguished wife, Fabia Aconia Paulina, a priestess of Isis. The letters of Symmachus and the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius show us the fine and sober and humane temper of this group. We have, in fact, reached here (the latter part of the fourth century) a turning-point, not only in the religious history of Europe, but also in the fortune of woman's aspiration. Up to this point the better tendencies of the Greek and Roman moralists were steadily advancing. The new freedom which woman had won in a period of licence was being legitimised and consecrated. There was no longer question of her inferiority, of putting her under the tutelage of her male relatives, of shutting her up in the *gynæceum*. Already she looked from the slope of Pisgah. Then every other moral agency was swept out of Europe by a politically triumphant Christianity—and the hopes and ambitions of women were sealed up for 1,500 years in the tomb of paganism. Let us see how this dire result came about.

## CHAPTER III.

## WOMAN IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN TEACHING

IN the introduction to her *Woman's Bible*, Mrs. E. Cady Stanton says: "The canon and civil law, Church and State, priests and legislators, all political parties and religious denominations, have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man." She goes on to show us the root of all this when, after describing woman according to the Bible, she says: "Those who have the divine insight to translate, transpose, and transfigure this mournful object of pity into an exalted, dignified personage, worthy our worship as the mother of the race, are to be congratulated as having a share of the occult mystic power of the eastern Mahatmas." This is the new influence that began to colour the social life and the legislation of Europe, and extinguished the brilliant promise of the closing years of paganism. "The life of woman," slightly to alter M. Renan's phrase, "was suspended for a thousand years."

It will hardly be questioned seriously that the teaching of the Old Testament with regard to woman was a menacing element. To-day we read our Old Testament in a circuitous way. We are told by every theologian who has any authority on the interpretation of the Bible that the Prophets were written first, the Law second; that those dreadful earlier books of the Old Testament, with their crude morality, are a late and fictitious compilation from fragments of ancient legend

and history, invested with a quite illegitimate divine authority. They express the efforts of the early Hebrews, who were barbarians at a time when the civilisations of Egypt and Babylon were grey with age, to emerge from their low moral condition. It has been a fatal accident, or artifice, that gave a uniform divine authority to the whole of this very different mass of literature. It involved the sanctioning with a divine authority of some of the crudest and most primitive conceptions of a late-developed race. Little did Esdras dream, when he finally edited the earlier books, that his action would have so grievous an influence on the social development of Europe! Yet it was this primitive Hebraic image of woman that from the year 400 onward cast an ever-deepening shadow over Christianity.

It is unnecessary to linger over this conception. Woman was to the Hebrews an inferior being, the cause of the Fall, a fragment detached from the virility of Adam. Polygamy and concubinage carry the story of woman's inferiority far into the best ages of Hebrew development.\*

\* Polygamy only began to disappear among the Jews in the fifth century B.C. And so curious was the influence of the Old Testament on the early Christian Church that several of the Fathers could not bring themselves to condemn it, and it was not officially suppressed by the Church until 1060 A.D. Luther and the Reformers allowed it even later. Yet polygamy was one of the surest signs of a disdain of woman, and had been rejected by Greeks, Romans, and barbarians long before the Hebrews began to perceive its enormity.

The familiar ritual of the Temple sanctioned it with a stern and odious injunction. The purification ceremony, with its reference to "sin" and "atone-ment," was in itself an offensive survival of a barbaric taboo; but when the law went on (Lev. xii. 2, 4) to direct that the process should last seven days in the case of a male child and fourteen for a female child, the inference was clear. Consistently, the Hebrew law and custom ignored females in the family chronicle. The Hebrew word for "male" is equivalent to "memory"; the word for "female" cannot with decency be translated literally into English. A daughter had no will to consult as to her marriage; she was virtually sold by her father; and she had no share of the inheritance. Repudiation of a wife was repulsively easy for a man, and punishments fell unevenly upon the sexes. The same strain of contempt is seen in the rigid exclusion of women from the service of the Deity, and even from the inner court of the Temple; and, indeed, all through the life and religion of the Jews. It is true that a few women contrived to win an honourable position in the Hebrew chronicles or romances; but, setting aside such equivocal heroines as Judith, they are types, to use the words of Mr. Lecky, "of a low order, and certainly far inferior to those of Roman history or Greek poetry."

We need not delay, however, in determining the inferiority of the Hebrew conception of woman to that of the great pagan nations which surrounded Palestine. We shall see that, rightly or wrongly, the Old Testament *was* the source of the fatal theory which grew up in the mind of the Fathers. For the same reason I will not stay to determine the attitude of Christ himself towards

woman. Moreover, he would be a bold man who would, in the present condition of New Testament scholarship, venture to formulate the opinion of Christ on any point. Theologians are beginning to dissect the Gospels in the same way that they have taken the Old Testament to pieces. The chief clerical scholars of Germany and England and America now speak freely of earlier and later "layers" of Biblical tradition. Already some of the most characteristic sayings and doings of Christ are rejected—by the leading theologians themselves, be it remembered—as late and unreliable interpolations. Until this process has reached its term, it is quite useless to speculate on Christ's attitude towards woman. There are traits in the Gospel figure of Christ which contrast gratefully with the harsh Hebraic tradition. Whether, however, these are not contributions of the Alexandrian Greeks to the Gospel mosaic it is impossible to say. This much is certain—the Christ of the Gospels gave not one word of clear guidance on this or any other social problem, and entered not one word of explicit protest against the injustice of the Judaic treatment of women.

But it will presently appear that this point is not really relevant to our purpose. It was the teaching of the Fathers that barred the way to the progress of woman's cause in Europe, and this was based on St. Paul and the Old Testament. The numerous references of St. Paul to woman are familiar. She shall veil her head in the churches, and shall not ask questions there as her husband may. She is subject to her husband as "head." The man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man. She shall not teach, for she brought ruin on the world, but shall be saved by child-bearing.

Here was a strong re-affirmation, under the new dispensation, of all the harsh and sophistic teaching of the old. The Gentile converts evidently fought at first against the Hebraic strain of contempt. St. Paul is clearly rebuking active revolts of Christian women here and there. In the spirit of the cultured pagan thought of the first century, they are claiming equality of treatment and a share in the work of the new Church. Salutations to women-workers are frequent. Deaconesses are active. There seems hope that the new religion will not follow the familiar masculine type. Then St. Paul smites down the feminist movement with his apostolic authority. Then the priesthood and episcopate rise into power, crushing out the deaconesses, and subordinating the deacons. The hierarchy becomes rigidly masculine. The Old Testament is, after long struggles, retained in the canon; and the maintenance of the old Hebraic harshness towards woman becomes inevitable.

No impartial student of the period can profess to have expected any other issue. Christianity was not a great intellectual movement. It was the outpouring of a stream of religious emotion that had been pent up by centuries of Judaic formalism. Its great task was to spiritualise religion. Of social problems it knew and cared nothing. To social injustice it was blind, for the real social order lay beyond the clouds. Hence on secondary questions, like this of the treatment of woman, it acquiesced in the feeling of its environment. Cultured pagans had reached a higher stage on the question; but the people at large held the older ideas, and Christianity, as a popular religion, took its colour from them. Thus, instead of taking up the nobler appeals of moralists like Seneca,

it came to ignore, and finally resist, them. Except in a few imperfect ways, it brought no hope, but a fresh refusal of hope to woman.

I have said that Christianity was not really in a position to influence the Roman social order until three centuries later. During those three centuries the Fathers raised the structure of Christian teaching which was to command the absolute allegiance of Europe until the Reformation at least. It is a matter of no less interest than importance to trace the growth of a religious contempt for woman through the patristic literature. But it is a sad page for any Christian woman to read. I begin with the Greek fathers, as these were not only earlier in time, and therefore present the theory of woman's inferiority in a slight and immature form, but they were also, through Alexandria, in closer touch with the humanist culture of the neo-Platonists.

Theology was born when the cultured Greek mind at Alexandria, then the Athens of the civilised world, came to reflect on the Gospel message. In this first stage of the theoretical interpretation of the New Testament we find the earliest traces of the reaction of the Hebrew tradition on Greek thought. Clement of Alexandria, the subtlest of the school, exhibits the ordinary improved feeling of the educated Greek of his time as regards women, when he writes as a philosopher. When he is asked if she may study philosophy like her brothers, he answers at once in the affirmative. She has the "same nature" as man. But as soon as he is confronted with the familiar texts from the Epistles of St. Paul, his humanism begins to waver. He must bow to the ruling of the Apostle that the man is her head, and all the rest. The first shadow of the

Hebrew idea of woman is creeping over the fine prospect that Greek culture has opened out for woman. Moreover, we find already in Clement of Alexandria that contempt of marriage which was soon to become one of the great errors of the Church. It interests us because it ever either springs from or leads to a contempt of woman. He says in the *Stromateis* that "fornication is a lapse from one marriage into many."<sup>1</sup> Origen, the most learned (and least orthodox) of the Fathers, betrays (it is hardly necessary to say) the same contempt of marriage. "Digamists"—that is to say, those who married a second time when the first wife was dead—"are saved in the name of Christ, but are by no means crowned by him"; and there are texts where he speaks with something very like censure of even first marriage. Athenagoras had already set the example of calling second marriage "a decent sort of adultery,"<sup>2</sup> and the phrase was to be repeated time after time, until at length a Church Council should introduce it into its decrees. But Origen and Clement and Athanasius were humane enough in their independent expressions concerning the nature and dignity of woman. In this they are Greeks. They merely bow to the harsh phrases of St. Paul when these call for comment.

<sup>1</sup> I take this and the next quotation from Lecky. In all other cases I translate direct, and literally, from the Greek or Latin.

<sup>2</sup> The early Romans had themselves looked with disfavour on second marriages, but this was on the ground of sentiment and loyalty of memory—on principles which were in themselves most commendable. The Fathers renewed the attack on second marriages, but on grounds which were socially mischievous. They had granted a first marriage as a concession to the weakness of the flesh, and drew an ascetic line at second marriage. This not only encouraged immorality, but tended always to obscure the dignity of woman and her love.

The other great trio of the Greek Fathers was St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzum. In their writings we find the shadow deepening and lengthening. They were trained in the best Greek schools, but soon passed out of touch with the culture of the day. St. Basil, of strong and trenchant mind, insists that woman is "man's equal in mental power, only less in bodily strength." When, however, he comes to deal with the Old Testament, he is prevented by his religious regard for all its books from setting its awful teaching aside. He can only murmur that its treatment of woman is "a mystery." St. Gregory of Nyssa, though a married bishop, furnishes to the monasteries of a later date a great deal of that religious depreciation of marriage of which I have spoken. He dwells constantly and morbidly on the praise of virginity. It was no part of God's primitive design that the race should be continued by sexual union. Marriage is the outcome of sin. St. Gregory of Nazianzum, the sweetest singer and most eloquent and emotional of the Greek Fathers, takes us a step lower in this degeneration of Christian culture as regards woman. In his poem to Olympias he expresses the growing feeling of woman's inferiority. Shall the maid Olympias learn philosophy? By no means. "Woman's philosophy is to obey the laws of marriage." She must refrain even from going to weddings and christenings; must not give a thought to public affairs—"Let thy house be thy city." Then the usual concern for virginity appears: "Blessed is the one who leads a celibate life, and soils not the divine image within him with the filth of concupiscence." And it has the inevitable ending in a contempt of woman:—



"Fierce is the dragon, and cunning the asp;  
But woman has the malice of both."

Finally, we have in St. John Chrysostom a continuance of this unhappy tendency. A great and popular preacher, with crowds of women always hanging on his lips in one of the chief cities of the Empire, he is nevertheless thoroughly Pauline. He sees symptoms of the feeble revolt that even Christian woman is ever raising against this new despotism of man, and he insists that "she shall not demand equality, for she is under the head." But Chrysostom never breaks into expressions of contempt.

When, however, we pass from the Greek to the Latin branch of the Church, and examine the writings of those Fathers who were the absolute guides of opinion for the next thousand years, this pious misogyny at once takes a more sombre, though at times a most amusing, form. A gulf was beginning to yawn between profane culture and sacred culture. A constant brooding over the Scriptures was accounted the only desirable form of learning; and the consequences were disastrous for the cause of woman.

Tertullian, the first of the Latin Fathers, a sternly ascetic figure, opens the chapter with the most violent phraseology. The first sentence of his work, *On the Adornment of Women*, runs: "If your faith were as firm as its eternal reward, my beloved sisters, no one of you, after learning of the living God and her own condition as a woman, would dare to seek gay apparel, but would dress in rags and remain in dirt as a sorrowful and penitent Eve." "Thou," he says, a few lines afterwards, "thou art the devil's gate, the betrayer of the tree, the first deserter of the divine law!" He, more than any others, praises virginity, until

at length he is moved to tell the virgin that marriage is "not far removed from fornication." The second great African Father, St. Cyprian, is more moderate in his phrases, though he forbids women to teach when a fresh effort is made to secure that outlet for the activity of Christian women.

When we pass to St. Augustine, however, the tendency becomes at once painfully apparent. It must not be believed that St. Augustine had, to use the common phrase, "burnt his fingers," and so went too far in the inevitable moral reaction. He never led the licentious life which it has been thought fit to ascribe to him.<sup>1</sup> We have in his writings a simple illustration of the way in which the teaching of the Old Testament and St. Paul with regard to woman entered into the social life of Europe. Saint Augustine, by nature one of the most humane as he was one of the ablest of his day, never loses an opportunity to express his disdain for woman. "After the manner of her sex," he observes in a sermon when speaking of a woman's anger. "What does it matter whether it be in the person of mother or sister; we have to beware of Eve in every woman," he writes to a youth who hesitates to join his monastery because his mother implores him to remain at home. But it is chiefly in his final and mature commentary on *Genesis* that the working of St. Augustine's mind is seen. Why was woman created at all? he asks himself, and he can find no answer but the painful need to carry on the race. Perhaps, he suggests to himself, she was made to be a companion to man. No, he replies at once, for "how much better

<sup>1</sup> As I have shown in my *Saint Augustine and His Age*.

two men could live and converse together than a man and a woman." Later, however, he discovers a peculiar reason for the creation of woman. He asks himself how this glorious being, as he has described Adam, could be deceived by the clumsy trickery of the serpent. Possibly, he goes on, God created a being of inferior intelligence and will—woman—with a view to the carrying-out of this pre-arranged drama of the Fall. So it is when St. Augustine comes to deal with the polygamous lives of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. As a heretic, he had boldly ridiculed them as barbaric types. As a convert, he had taken refuge in the broad harbour of "mystery." Now, in his new conviction of woman's absolute inferiority, he sees polygamy to be a perfectly defensible arrangement. In one of his works (*De bono conjugali*) he is ready to allow that, even in Christian times, a man may have a second wife or mistress if his first is barren, though still alive. But would he allow a wife two husbands? No, because "by a secret law of nature things that are higher must be unique, while the things that are subject are set under—not only one under one, but, if the system of nature or society allow, even several under one, not without becoming dignity."

The two other leaders of Latin Christianity, St. Ambrose and St. Jerome, are little more favourable to woman. St. Ambrose does not, indeed, show any deliberate contempt. Woman must be obedient, but not servile, to her husband. In one place he makes an amusing attempt to find a ground for the restriction of her work and education. She is more fitted for bodily work, he says, because "remember that God took a rib out of Adam's body, not a part of his soul, to make her." And when he is

asked why she must veil herself in the churches, while her husband does not, he answers, because "*she* was not made to the image of God, like man." St. Jerome, who through most of his life had a circle of noble Roman ladies in daily intercourse with him, has nevertheless a fine theoretical contempt for woman. A great Scriptural scholar, he never fails to endorse and amplify the disdainful references to woman in the Old Testament, such as that she is "the root of all evil." He points out with some complacency how rarely the saints of the Old Testament are described as having daughters, though they have many sons, and how the reverse is true of the wicked kings. In his attacks on Jovinian—a Luther of the fourth century—he habitually depreciates woman for the purpose of discrediting marriage; "but marriage is good for those who are afraid to sleep alone at night," he says. In a letter to Heliodorus, who hesitates to join him in the desert, he says: "Though thy father cling to thee, and thy mother rend her garments and show thee the breasts thou hast sucked, thrust them aside with dry eyes to embrace the cross." This letter is said to have been learned by heart by Jerome's lady pupils.

We thus see that while, as I described in the preceding chapter, a remarkable advance was being made in the cultured mind of the age with regard to the treatment of women, the Christian Church was preparing a terrible reaction. Stoic and neo-Platonist thinkers, and educated Romans in general, were forming a more enlightened judgment. From the north the barbarians were marching down with a great and menacing fund of undisciplined passion, it is true, yet with an ideal of womanhood which was singularly just and elevated. From the south and

east the new religions of Egypt and Persia were bringing an equally liberal and humane temper on this point. A fair field was opening to the hope and ambition of woman. But all the time the shadow of the Hebraic ideal was falling over the Christian Church, and the Christian Church was destined to reach the supreme authority. By the end of the fourth century "paganism" was in its agony. By the middle of the fifth century it was dead, and Christianity was all-powerful. The writings of Augustine and Ambrose and Jerome ruled the life of Europe. Their ideas about women enter into the Church life and social life and the legislation of every country, as it settles down into orderly administration.

In the fifth century the Councils began to close the door of the ministry effectually against women. Few deaconesses can be found after that time. One by one the public functions were reserved for the clergy. Women were forbidden, successively, to teach, to baptise, to preach, or take any order whatever. Councils of bishops began to dispose of women in a curious fashion. At the Council of Macon, in 585, a bishop was found to hold the opinion that woman had no soul.<sup>1</sup> He was immediately corrected, but the appearance of a bishop with such a theory is significant. At the Council of Auxerre, in 578, the bishops forbade women, on account of their "impurity," to take the sacrament in their hands as men did. On every side woman was forced to retire from the position she had won. The dignity

which the Stoics had at length granted her was flung to the winds once more. "The chain was broken," says Mlle. Chauvin in her *Professions accessibles aux femmes*. "With these Jewish doctrines, supported presently by the old legal texts, tradition recovered its force. A new and larger and more painful evolution had to commence, in the course of which the two conflicting principles, conquering and conquered in turn, gave to the Middle Ages a very varied and often contradictory legislation."

The profound social importance of the adoption of this reactionary view of woman is best realised in the legislation of the following centuries. We have seen that the harshness of the old Roman law had almost disappeared by the beginning of the second century. Custom and legal devices had taken the sting out of what was left. But when the influence over the legislative authorities passes from the Stoics to the Christian prelates, reaction sets in. I have already quoted Sir Henry Maine's judgment that "the latest Roman law, so far as it is touched by the Constitutions of the Christian emperors, bears some marks of a reaction against the liberal doctrines of the great Antonine jurisconsults." In the political disruption of Europe that followed the barbarian invasion there was a period of judicial chaos, during which the modifications induced by custom were lost sight of. When the study of the texts was resumed, their literal harshness was felt to coincide with the teaching of the Fathers, and was applied without mercy. In the feudal legislation which was built up out of the barbaric customs and the Roman law, under Church influence, woman sank lower and lower. In this section theology and canon law interfered more than anywhere

<sup>1</sup> Bebel and Mlle. Chauvin, and other feminist writers, give a wrong impression that the Council deliberated on the subject. The *acta* of the Council make it clear that only one bishop held the opinion, to the horror of his colleagues.

else. In the end a legislation emerged which was compounded of the old Roman injustice and the new Judæo-Christian contempt. The whole of the ground won in Greece and Rome was lost. Woman, as Mr. Lecky says, sank to a lower legal position than she had ever occupied under paganism. "In this union of Church and State," says Mrs. Cady Stanton, "mankind touched the lowest depth of degradation."

I am, however, descending too speedily into the abyss of the Dark Ages, though it is, perhaps, advisable to point out at once the frightful retrogression that took place. But before examining in greater detail the miserable period for woman which the teaching of the Fathers initiated, it is advisable to glance at the brighter side of the influence of Christianity. How, in the face of all this, can ecclesiastical writers make such urgent claim to the gratitude of women? How could a humane and elevated religion like early Christianity fail so utterly to support this social reform? The truth is that Christianity did bring into the Roman world—though it was not the only religion to do so—ideals and principles which aided the cause of woman; but it nullified their action by impractical excesses and mischievous errors. I am not thinking so much of the elevation of Mary to the supreme position among mortals. So far was this from being a novelty in the Roman world that it was, on the contrary, forced on the Church itself by the inveterate custom of the pagans. Isis and Cybele and Frigga and Minerva, and the hundred other pagan goddesses, could only be banished from the hearts of the people by a substitution of the image of Mary. Statues of Isis and hymns to Cybele were adapted to

the mother of Christ. Moreover, the Church strictly insisted that Mary had been raised to such an altitude by no effort, and for no merit, of her own; hence the elevation gave little real encouragement.

But it is urged that Christianity at least aided the cause of woman by raising matrimony to the dignity of a sacrament. Those who write like this read the teaching of the modern Church into the early centuries. It is perfectly true that the Roman world needed a more serious conception of the marriage bond, though it is also true that the Romans of the fourth century had less to learn in this direction than is usually supposed. It is true, again, that the Christian Church brought a severe ideal of marriage, and so far rendered a social service, and a service to woman. But the Church took away with the left hand what it gave with the right. While sustaining the rigour it destroyed the dignity of marriage. It set itself, as St. Jerome expressed it, to "lay the axe of virginity at the root of the tree of matrimony." It never declared marriage sinful, but it went as near to such a declaration as was possible. It strongly and persistently, by all its great teachers, advocated abstinence from marriage. It denounced divorce with an irrational zeal—though the Fathers said it was not absolutely unjustifiable for the *husband* to re-marry when the wife had sinned—and it used violent language of second marriages. It represented sexual love to be an outcome of sin; strictly forbade indulgence in it, even for married folk, for its own sake, and on the eve of holy days; condemned it as incompatible with the holy office of the priest; and generally ascribed to it an odour of the pit. No great social service, and no advantage to

woman, could result from a gospel which was marred by such eccentricities.

Of the other services to women which are alleged only a few gave absolute advantages. The opening for women which was provided by the founding of nunneries will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter, but it may be said at once that this is a strange claim. The theologian might just as well boast that he opened up the profession of usury to the Jew by closing every other profession and employment against him. Legouvé finds that Christianity conferred an incalculable boon on woman by insisting, "for the first time in the history of the world," that the husband was just as rigorously bound to fidelity as the wife. We have already seen by many quotations that this was a common doctrine of the Stoics and neo-Platonists; and Legouvé admits that what the Church did in this respect soon disappeared in the disorder of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, one can readily and gladly admit that several of the Christian emperors did obtain changes in law in favour of women; but these were quickly neutralised in that fatal reconstruction of European law which all admit to have been disastrous for women, and which was in this department predominantly ruled by the Church law. "This will never be a good world for women," said Kingsley, repeating the opinion of Maine, "until the last remnant of the canon law is swept from the face of the earth."

In this wise, therefore, came and passed a great crisis in the affairs of women 1,500 years ago. We have seen that the notion of woman being uniformly oppressed or degraded under pagan ideas, and of her condition beginning to improve as soon as Christianity came to power, is the reverse of the truth. Here

and there over England you find, perhaps on a desolate moor, some trace of one of the solid roads that the Romans extended over Europe 2,000 years ago, and that no succeeding people would even try to maintain until our own age. Those relics of Roman roads, peeping out of centuries of idle undergrowth, fitly symbolise the fortune of woman's cause in Europe. The work that was done for woman was allowed to lapse—nay, was stricken from the hands of the converted peoples. The life of the Middle Ages has clothed it with idle weeds, so that we only recover it with difficulty to-day. Woman has had to wait for the new paganism of our time—our Condorcets, and Robert Owens, and J. S. Mills—to stretch a hand back across the gulf of the Christian domination, and take up afresh the work of Plutarch and Seneca and Hypatia. With what truth the intervening age is called a gulf (in this respect), and into what depths the Judæo-Christian theory of woman allowed men to descend, I proceed to indicate, as briefly as possible, in the next chapter. But I cannot but apply in this connection the words in which Mr. Lowes Dickinson refers to Plato's teaching on another social question: "With what a breath of the air of dawn, what a gleam of Mediterranean light, do these words come wafting, as in a blue heaven, over the delirious fumes of the Middle Ages, to remind us of what men were before they had learned to distrust their own fairest impulses and instincts, and to seek in authority the good and the true, which it is their privilege to divine through experience." These words come spontaneously to the pen when one passes from the old pagan work for woman over the abyss of the Middle Ages to the awakening of Europe in the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER IV.

## WOMAN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

THE period through which I am now going to follow the fortunes of woman, in so far as they were influenced by the Church, stretches from the fifth century to the fifteenth. It is necessary to pick one's way through this part of history with care. Nothing would be easier than to plunge into medieval chronicles, or the writings of Lecky, White, Buckle, Milman, Lea, etc., and pile up an indictment of the Middle Ages, and so of the Church which dominated the Middle Ages, that would unnerve any apologist. It is just possible, on the other hand, as Maitland showed, to avoid the mud, and step daintily from tuft to tuft, and then persuade the world that the Dark Age is not a morass at all. I wish to do neither. I wish to outline with impartial pencil the course of the woman cause from the fifth to the fifteenth century, to touch the features of social life only in so far as they illustrate this, and so to discover with what gratitude or resentment the woman of to-day may look back to the dominance of the Christian Church in Europe during that period. The subject is enormously complicated and seductive, so that I must keep conscientiously to the narrow path lit by my inquiry.

One of the women writers who has best succeeded—apart from unreliable sectaries—in discovering the consolations which medieval life offered to women says: "Although women appear to have had a wider field of activity than they afterwards enjoyed when social life became more complex, there was a

counteracting influence which told against the development and free exercise of their energies. This was the influence of the Church. It was the policy of the Church to keep women in a subordinate position."<sup>1</sup> Other writers on the fortunes of women use stronger phrases. Mlle. Chauvin says that "at the close of the Middle Ages reaction was triumphant in the whole of society, in every rank, every subject, every function," and she expressly traces this to that shadow of the Hebraic ideal of woman which I have described as stealing over Christendom. Legouvé (*Histoire morale des femmes*, p. 183) says that "under the feudal regime conjugal morals return to brutality." I will not venture to quote the language of Mrs. Gage, or Mr. Lecky, or Mr. Lea, or Professor K. Pearson, or Professor W. White, or Bebel, or Büchner. Let us examine the question with patience and method. Medieval Europe arose from the fusion of the dissolving Roman Empire with the invading Celts and Teutons. On both sides there was, to begin with, or before conversion to Christianity, a fair ideal of womanhood. What was the result of the fusion as regards the general esteem of woman and her work? And how far was the Church responsible for the result?

After all that we have seen, from Sir Henry Maine and Mlle. Chauvin, and

<sup>1</sup> Georgiana Hill, *Women in English Life*, p. vii.



other legal writers, it is hardly necessary to linger over the question of woman's position in law. It became worse than it had been in any civilised nation for many a century. By the end of the eleventh century the dominance of the Church or Canon Law was supreme, and it determined the common law, whose barbarities we have only lately repealed. In an earlier chapter I illustrated it from the legal condition of woman in Massachusetts little more than half a century ago. Its fundamental principle was the inferiority of woman. She was deprived of the control of her person and property, deprived of the resource of legal testimony, and made morally and economically dependent to a pernicious extent on her husband. There is no defence of this legal degradation of woman, and there is no question but that, after allowing for the influence of the ancient Roman texts, it was due to the dominance of Church law over civic law. It is unnecessary to say more of disabilities which are yet fresh in the memory of women.

It is not so easy to express in brief the industrial and political position of woman during the Middle Ages, as the conditions were exceedingly varied and the authorities seem to be discordant. It is possible to distinguish three broad stages. From the fifth to the eleventh century the industrial position of woman remained what it had been under the older religion, but she lost the old respect. It had been a recognised and necessary institution of barbaric life that the women should work while the men fought. As Christianity completely failed to check their pugnacity and bloodshed, the work of the women was little changed. But they were no longer held to be "something sacred and pro-

phetic." The Age of Iron (up to the eleventh century) had no time to think of the economic position of woman. Here and there the women of the higher class had some distinction. The Anglo-Saxon woman could inherit and dispose of property, and could sue in the courts. Sometimes she succeeded to a barony, and exercised the full local jurisdiction attaching to it; there are records of her attendance at the Witenagemote. With the coming of the Normans, however, she lost her right to hold property—the root of all power and enduring respect—and became more dependent. And the condition of the poorer women was everywhere degraded. Professor K. Pearson suspects that the men of the Germanic tribes had accepted Christianity eagerly because it was a masculine religion, and lent itself to the subjection of their wives. The older religions were women-made, as they went back to a matriarchal age. Hence the women suffered heavily by the conversion of the tribes to Christianity.

But in what I call the second stage of the Middle Ages woman's industrial position greatly improved. Almost every craft and trade was open to her as well as to men, and some, such as brewing, were almost reserved to women. They were admitted to guilds, they joined with the men in building the great cathedrals and in making pilgrimages, and so on. As abbesses of the great monasteries that now sprang up, women here and there obtained a very high distinction in the community. The old Germanic feeling towards them re-appeared in the well-known form of chivalry. The new-born poetry of Europe was filled with the praise of woman and the desire to serve her. In places they had a considerable culture. Learned ladies corresponded in



Latin with eminent prelates. Sometimes they opened public schools—as when the widow and daughters of Master Manegold continued that teacher's school of philosophy at Paris after his death.

This is the period of medieval life in which enthusiasts seek evidence with which to rebut the name of the "Dark Ages." As the Middle Ages embrace seven or eight long and changeful centuries, it is obvious that one can easily select sufficient passages of romance and even beauty from its chronicles to make an alluring picture—if one ignores all the rest. I have not to defend here the phrase "Dark Ages," except insofar as woman is concerned; but I may admire, as I pass, the facility with which these optimistic writers can overlook the crass ignorance of the people, the violence and knavery that covered the whole country, the plagues and famines that decimated towns and villages every few years, the flood of spurious and indecent relics, the degradation of the clergy and monks, the slavery of the serfs, the daily brutalities of the ordeal and the torture, the coarse and bloody pastimes, the insecurity of life, the triumphant ravages of disease, the check of scientific inquiry, and a hundred other features of medieval life. A humane romanticist, like Scott or Morris, will temper those features; but spend a few hours over the Latin text of the medieval chronicles! If, indeed, this were only a transitional stage between barbarism and civilisation, we could pardon much. But we know perfectly well to-day that the Roman Empire at its death had handed on to Europe a fine system of education, an excellent beginning of medical science, an effective restraint of violence and cupidity, a concern for culture and humanity, an admirable legal system, and

a superb scheme of roads, bridges, aqueducts, and other material conveniences.

However, to return to my point, the position of woman in the best period of the Middle Ages fell far short of what the earlier progressive movement had promised. The medieval woman of the wealthier class had one choice—marriage or the nunnery. In the latter case she might become abbess, and so exercise a certain power over her community and the dependent villagers. In neither case could she hope, except in an illegitimate and unenviable way, to take any active interest in public affairs. The lady of the manor dwelt with her young children in an upper part of the house. She came down to dine and meet visitors in the hall; and her position as mistress, and the frequent absence of her lord, gave her some distinction. But her world was a painfully narrow one. Rarely educated, immersed in the task of seeing to the sewing and brewing and spinning, united for life to a man she had not chosen, and jealously screened from intercourse with other men, her chance of happiness was limited. We find a great lady highly praised because in forty years she never went ten miles away from her home. Her life was a species of slavery in comparison with the life of woman at that very period in pagan Japan or among the Moors in Spain.

Moreover, it was only the woman of the higher classes who had any recompense for her loss of liberty under the feudal system. The wife of the labourer was a chattel of the estate. Her life was one of unceasing drudgery; it is folly to take the village pastimes of her teens and early twenties as any redemption of her bondage. She was sold into slavery to her husband by her father, and was treated with a different legal code from

her brother. Her husband had the legal "right" to flog her—a legal and religious encouragement of the most brutal act man can stoop to—and to claim for her the pain and degradation of public punishment if she resented his coarseness. The ducking-stool, the scold's bridle, the stocks, and other such institutions, ensured her submission and silence. And if she attempted to live apart from the coarseness and violence when her first husband was dead, there hung over her continuously the dread accusation of witchcraft and the brutal and stupid tests of it that the Middle Ages provided. From the Church she could get no word but "obedience"; man was made in the image of God, but woman was not.

I have said that there was a third category of medieval woman—the nuns, and the women who worked at trades and crafts in the towns. I will speak presently of conventual life as such; but, though it is true that for a short time the towns and the convents offered varied employment to women, the increasing penetration of the canon law into the general system, and other causes, soon brought this to an end. Through the nunneries women had resumed the profession of teaching, which the early Church had taken from them. Nuns were also taught and practised the rudimentary medicine of the medieval world. In the towns all the lighter and some of the heavier crafts were opened to them. All this, Mlle. Chauvin says, disappeared in the course of the thirteenth century—the most Christian century of the whole era. It would be absurd, no doubt, to see the action of canon law alone in this narrowing of woman's industrial sphere (and therefore of her economic independence), but it

would have been impossible for men to accomplish it if there had not been a lowering of the general feeling with regard to woman.

That there was this perversion of the general attitude towards woman needs little proof. For the earlier portion of the Middle Ages it is plausible to hold the Church excused on the ground of its powerlessness to restrain the violent and semi-civilised northern barbarians. One cannot help recalling that it is clear from their legends that their earlier religion, as long as they believed in it, had been able to restrain them, especially in the matter of respect for their wives. It is singular that Christianity should have suffered so many of them to descend even to polygamy for several centuries. However, it is more important to observe that the violence of the wicked was not a whit more injurious to woman than the religiousness of the good. That is a paradoxical statement, but the reader must remember at what point we left the Christian conception of woman in the fifth and sixth centuries. The extravagances of the Fathers were repeated with terrible emphasis in the Middle Ages. St. Jerome and St. Augustine had urged their friends to thrust aside their mothers with stern disdain. St. Columban, accordingly, stepped over the prostrate form of his mother as she clung to the door-posts to keep him from the dreaded monastery. St. Elizabeth of Thuringia sent her children away because the love of them interfered with her spiritual growth; she was content when at last she could look on them with the same indifference as on other children. It was an act of heroism; but it was a crushing indictment of the religious system that directed her. St. Catherine of

Siena<sup>1</sup> assured her contemporaries, who believed her to be inspired, that the blessed in heaven were so united with God that "if a father or mother sees her son in hell, or the son his father or mother, they will not be troubled." Often enough this kind of piety took the form of the patristic contempt of woman. We have a letter (No. III.) written by St. Bernard in the name of one of his monks to parents who were imploring him to return to them. There is no question but that it was written by St. Bernard himself, the greatest spiritual ruler of the Middle Ages. It contains passages such as this :—

What have I to do with you? What have I received from you but sin and misery? Only this corruptible body that I bear do I confess that I hold from you. Is it not enough for you that you have brought me into this miserable world; that you, being sinners, have begotten me in sin; that, being born in sin, you have nourished me in sin; but you must envy me the mercy of God I have obtained, and wish to make of me a son of hell? You may choose to neglect your own salvation, but why should you wish also to destroy mine?

Such scenes as the Egyptian desert had witnessed—when, for instance, an aged mother had crossed the wilderness, with great pain and fatigue, to have a last look at her hermit sons, and they slammed the door upon her—were seen on every side in the Middle Ages.

This question of the conventual life of the Middle Ages has many sides, it is true. It is frequently said that woman was indebted to the Church for providing this retreat from a violent world. From the description which Mrs. Hill—who urges this point—gives of the painfully retired character of woman's life in the

upper storeys of the great manor houses, one would think that further retreat from the world was unnecessary. It must be noted, too, that other apologists for the conventual system commend it for a precisely opposite reason; that is to say, because it affords women their one opportunity of taking a share in the active work of the world. However, we shall the more quickly reach a true estimate of its value if we grant both claims, in different applications, and pass on to consider the other side of the conventual system. On a broad view of the situation it is impossible to doubt that the concentration of women in nunneries during the Middle Ages was a great social evil. Let me put it in a concrete form. A few years ago I had occasion to study the conventual system in France about the beginning of the twelfth century, for the purpose of writing a life of Abélard and Heloise. I found that the chief ecclesiastical chroniclers of the time spoke with bitterness of the moral condition of the great majority of the nunneries, and case after case turned up in the chronicles of the suppression of convents on account of their immorality. On the other hand, two or three reformers of the type of St. Bernard were causing the erection of huge nunneries of a strictly virtuous character. But what was the *social* effect of this new crusade? Its chief result was to break up thousands of refined homes, and to withdraw from their natural task of sweetening the world thousands of married women of the better type. In the one abbey of Fontevraud there were many hundreds of married women who had left their husbands. Abélard's mother and wife both entered nunneries. This was happening in every Christian country, in

<sup>1</sup> I quote this and the two preceding incidents from Miss Eckenstein's *Woman under Monasticism*.

direct proportion to its religious earnestness, all through the Middle Ages. We may fully recognise that this was heroic conduct, and that it was prompted by the most elevated motives ; but it was a disastrous procedure for the cause of womankind, if not of mankind. Now that the world at large has discarded the conventual ideal as an illusion, this should be obvious. Then, if ever, there was work for women to do in the world, and women like Heloise knew it. But they were persuaded or forced to bury themselves in convents, where, if they escaped the degradation which so often befel those institutions, their devotion was absorbed in a pitiful struggle against maternal instinct and the sense of injustice to their sex.

Nor can this question be left without some reference to the effect on the world at large of setting up these unnatural standards of virtue. The strange idea is entertained sometimes that it was particularly expedient to set up this transcendental ideal in a vicious world like that of the Middle Ages. It would be difficult to conceive any theory less warranted by the actual experience of the Christian Church. From the days when St. Jerome and St. Augustine gave their austere message to the Roman world such preaching had been a failure. A few were converted, and realised the ethereal type set before them at the expense of a sacrifice of all the best gifts of life. The vast majority of the people felt the message to be an unnatural one, and totally disregarded it. The excesses of the Fathers were fully sustained by the medieval theologians. One monk of Monte Cassino published a vision of hell (from which Dante probably borrowed) that had been vouchsafed to him. In one of its most fearful depart-

ments were the souls of men and women who had not abstained from their conjugal rights on the eves of holy days ! Peter Lombard, one of the most weighty of the schoolmen, laid it down that it was a venial sin only for married folk to have intercourse, when children were impossible, for the purpose of avoiding incontinence, but a mortal sin to do it for the pleasure alone. St. Thomas, and practically all the theologians, held (and hold to-day) that the pleasure attaching to procreation was not part of God's original design, but a direct consequence of sin. A woman was made to kneel outside the church to be "purified" after child-birth before she could again share in the worship. Naturally, the people at large felt this conception of love to be unnatural and untrue, and they followed their own inclinations. Prostitution assumed terrible proportions, and was virtually sanctioned by Church and State at times. Burckhardt says that there were found to be 6,800 prostitutes (besides innumerable concubines) in Rome alone in 1490. In German cities foreign princes were greeted with bands of them provided by the municipality ; and the Church was content to enact that they must attend worship at times. When venereal disease was introduced from America, it spread through all classes, from pope to peasant, with the most appalling rapidity.

I am loth to enter in detail on the question of the unrestrained licence of the Middle Ages, but there are still one or two respects in which it concerns our subject—namely, the culpability of the Church and the mischief wrought by its reactionary conception of woman and the family. The first is the right of the baron, and at times of the ecclesiastical potentate, to the newly married woman

for one or more days. This was only seriously attacked in France, and then by the peasants themselves, in the sixteenth century. The sacred prostitution practised in some of the Syrian temples was a perverse religious custom, enjoined by the priests. This medieval custom was suffered by the Christian Church in defiance of its sternest ideals. The second important point was the enforcement of obligatory confession in the thirteenth century. It is unnecessary to enlarge on this. The third was the fateful and fatal enforcement of sacerdotal celibacy. Lea's *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy* must instruct those who desire fuller information about the effect of this. I will only quote the conclusion of Mr. Lecky, that "the writers of the Middle Ages are full of the accounts of nunneries that were like brothels, of the vast multitude of infanticides within their walls, and of that inveterate prevalence of incest among the clergy which rendered it necessary again and again to issue the most stringent enactments that priests should not be permitted to live with their mothers and sisters." When Hildebrand failed to induce the civil and ecclesiastical authorities to enforce celibacy among the clergy, he sent emissaries to stir up the people against them, and frightful disorders ensued. Urban II. gave nobles permission to enslave the wives who would not surrender their priest-husbands. Other nobles levied a tax on the clergy of their districts under the title of permission to keep concubines. The whole proceeding was in itself a contempt of woman, and it had for one of its chief consequences an increase of her medieval degradation. The terrible growth of unnatural vice among the clergy—described in a work of the

eleventh century written by a cardinal and warmly commended by the pope—does not concern us. But the growth of concubinage was a frightful comment on the Church's claim to have uplifted woman. Things came to such a pass that parishioners, for the protection of their own families, compelled their clergy to keep concubines. Even when the higher clergy met sometimes for ecumenical councils, the occasion was marked by a notable concourse of women.

It has been necessary to touch briefly on these well-known features of medieval life in order to bring out the position of woman and the responsibility of the Church for that position. At the same time, the canon law itself was making enactments that obviously increased the growing disorder. The Church had raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. But, besides undermining that dignity by the free use of "the axe of virginity" and a morbid disdain of love, it largely neutralised its work by fencing marriage about with numerous restrictions and impediments, for the lifting of which money had to be paid to Rome. As early as the ninth century marriage was forbidden—without a bought dispensation—within seven degrees of kindred. The degrees of carnal relationship were reduced, but at the same time it was enacted that spiritual relationship (of god-parents and god-children) should be an impediment. All these restrictions tended to foster disorder and free unions. The same must be said of the Church's irrational rigidity as regards divorce. Sexual disorder increased. Woman became cheaper in the esteem of men, and the narrowing of her interest to domestic work and the desire to please men proceeded apace.

The subject would not be complete

without a formal reference to the treatment of witches. It is possible to exaggerate the culpability of the Church in this matter. The age was intensely superstitious, and it was a part of the almost universal practice of men, in or out of Christian times, to regard an injury as the work of malicious deities, or evil genii, or devils. When Christianity had, as is usual with triumphant religions, turned all the old pagan deities into devils, this practice was inevitably increased without any direct encouragement; but that the distinctive teaching of the Christian Bible and Church *was* particularly responsible for this awful chapter of medieval history cannot be questioned. The mere fact that men such as John Wesley retained the old idea in the full light of the nineteenth century is proof enough of its having a Scriptural base; nor is there the slightest doubt that the Church fostered, instead of moderating, the practice, just as it solemnly presided at the clumsy and brutal ordeal and judicial duel. Mrs. Hill goes so far as to claim that "the Church was largely responsible for the terrible persecutions inflicted on women, and chiefly on the poorest and most helpless, on the ground of witchcraft," through its "dissemination of the theory of woman's inherent vice." Most certainly this side of the teaching of the Church had a great deal to do with it. There is ample evidence for this in the language of the time. The painfulness of the facts is not mitigated when we remember that these "witches" were among the very few who brought relief to the sick poor in those days. Professor K. Pearson, in his most suggestive chapters on woman in his *Ethic of Free-thought*, puts the indictment in a more interesting light. The witches were

largely, he thinks, the successors of the "wise women" (the name was given to them, it will be remembered) who were held in such honour among the Germanic peoples before their conversion. Christianity had no further use for them. It brushed them disdainfully aside, and represented their communications with the pagan gods as a social evil. Thus, by the simple process of giving the name of devils to the gods of the older religion, it turned priestesses into witches, doctors into maleficent hags, and a disposition that had been respected as almost more than human into a less than human viciousness and ugliness.<sup>1</sup> The ghastly and prolonged outrage on the more helpless women of Europe that ensued must be considered when one is calculating what woman owes to Christianity.

Finally, a balanced and impartial judgment on the position of woman in the Middle Ages must take account of chivalry. The progress of historical truth is impeded by nothing more fatally than by exaggerating the evil or ignoring the good of the Middle Ages. When a Freethinker like William Morris can represent the golden age of the future as a sort of revival of the Middle Ages,<sup>2</sup> there must have been some beauty and joy in it. There was a great deal of both in the later Middle Ages, though the Church was not at all responsible for the latter, and was only the director,

<sup>1</sup> For a convenient glimpse at the old Germanic idea of woman's dignity and closer approach to the gods, I would commend the relevant passages in Kingsley's *Hypatia*. It is almost the only part of the novel that may be taken as sound history.

<sup>2</sup> But it is hardly necessary to point out that Morris is thinking of a fourteenth century purified of the horrors I have described; he is not denying that they were there in the past. Hence the fallacy of quoting him as an admirer of the Middle Ages.

not the creator, of the former. However that may be, we have to take account of this great movement known as chivalry, which is so much urged on us by those who, for some occult reason, think themselves bound to defend the Dark Ages. In some respects, the history of chivalry lies like a path of light across the gloom of the period. People are apt to jumble together a good many things under the head of chivalry—the Holy Grail, the troubadours, the knightly champions of ladies, and so on. We must distinguish. The movement which centres about the quest of the Holy Grail was a great force for good; but it was an ascetic movement, and did nothing for woman. Study *Parsifal*, or Tennyson's *Holy Grail*, in default of serious history. The troubadour movement was a defiant denial of the theological advice as regards woman, yet was based on much the same estimate of her. To this movement she was a centre of sexual charm, a pretty doll—little or nothing more.

Chivalry proper was a more complicated matter. It is now, however, recognised by many historians that it was mainly an erotic and licentious movement. Dante was near the truth when he ascribed the sin of Paolo and Francesca to reading some of their gay exploits. Professor K. Pearson suggests that the sole object of all these knightly adventures was sexual gratification. Certainly the whole of the legends are redolent of free love.<sup>1</sup> That there was incidental good issue from it is obvious; but it was not a movement that could have been inspired by the ascetic Christian Church. It was rather a resurgence of the old Germanic regard

for woman, with this difference, that it now looked chiefly to her physical beauty, and made a doll of her. Hence, though here and there it encouraged culture in women, and generally relieved the gloom in which the new religion would enwrap her "as a sorrowful and repentant Eve," it was not of much lasting use to the cause of woman. At the most, we may welcome it as a sign that at this time the nobles bade the priests keep for themselves their pessimistic estimate of woman, and acknowledged that she was, at least, a pleasant and amiable creature. Women who have no higher ambition may be content with that. Others will patiently observe that, behind all this glittering show and lip-worship, woman's legal and economic and political position steadily deteriorated.

In summing up, therefore, we must say that through the whole of this strange and chequered period we find the patristic depreciation of woman sinking into the mind of Europe and breaking out in its social life. In the better features of the time women have, as a rule, no part. They are not benefited by the quest of the Holy Grail; they have very little share in the vivid intellectual movement of the twelfth century, and none in that of the thirteenth, or in the artistic movement that sprang up beside it and formed the chief glory of the Middle Ages. Like the Jews, they are gradually driven from every profession and public office. Theologians and ecclesiastical jurists obtain supreme power, and these are the most deadly enemies of women. Life-long seclusion in the inner apartments of a man she has not chosen, or interment in a nunnery that is either degraded or unnatural, is the choice (within limits) of the daughter of the wealthy. Life-long drudgery, with few

<sup>1</sup> Even Hallam says: "The gallantry of those ages was often very adulterous. . . . The morals of chivalry, we cannot deny, were not pure" (p. 666).



and coarse pleasures, with a long vista of sticks and whips, and scolds'bridles, and ducking-stools, with, perhaps, the brutal ordeal on the slightest suspicion,

or the ghastly death of the witch, is the prospect of the daughter of the poor. Let us see what the next stage of Christian development will do for her.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE EFFECT OF THE REFORMATION

THUS far, the cause of woman has had little reason to welcome the supplanting of the native religions of Europe by Judaic Christianity. It must be distinctly understood that I speak of the cause of woman as a problem of social ethics. I am meeting the claim that woman has been freed, uplifted, or ennobled in some way by the coming of the Christian Church. To test this I took woman as she was, and had fair hope to be, in the fourth century, when Christianity became a social force. She had then obtained almost complete control of her person and her property, had the right to make independent recourse to law, was respected in public life when her ability won a position in it, and had beaten down in the minds of most thoughtful men the older feeling of her inferiority. The average active woman of our day will say that it remained to secure for her complete economic independence and civic and political equality; and she will hardly even ask if Christianity gave any assistance in this direction. But we may just as confidently meet the woman with less ambition for her sex, and say that the coming of Christianity wrought evil even from her modest point of view. The teaching of the great Chris-

tian leaders, caught up by the medieval theologians, embodied in the canon law, and thence conveyed to the civil law, stamped afresh upon the mind of Europe the idea of woman's inferiority. Only a desperate champion of the Church will find consolation in the thought that some few evaded the pressure by unsex-ing themselves in nunneries and becoming abbesses or saints. The sacrifice of all the joy of life is a heavy price to pay for a little dignity.

We must take a broad view, but not a vague one. We must not think that all was well because we can quote a few prominent names of queens or ladies from English history; or because we catch a glimpse of feminine culture here and there in the course of a thousand years; or because the Church canonised women in whom it believed their human nature to have been suppressed. The fact is that, on the one hand, the Christian Church did nothing for woman which the Stoic and neo-Platonist moralists were not doing—except to build nunneries; and, on the other, it re-introduced the ideas they were successfully uprooting, undid the whole of their reform of the law with regard to her, suffered the most violent and unjust

usage of her to spread, and by its absurd conception of love and marriage and celibacy occasioned a vast amount of disorder. By the fourteenth century woman (on the average) was not morally higher than in the fourth, and she was much lower in all other respects. We now begin to ascend once more from the valley of the Middle Ages, and we must see how much Christianity had to do with this tardy return to the path of progress.

The question naturally occurs at once, whether the Reformation brought any advantage to the cause of woman; but we may first give a passing glance at the effect of the Renaissance. This hardly extended beyond Italy, and was not permanent. There are women writers who think the revival of Greek culture in the Renaissance had, if anything, a bad effect on the position of woman. Mlle. Chauvin, usually so well informed, commits herself to the statement that "education, so generous in the convents of the Middle Ages, was now restricted to the catechism, to writing, reading, and a little arithmetic." She is wrong in both terms of the comparison. Profane culture was usually very much discouraged in the convents of the Middle Ages; and, in fact, the amount of teaching done by these institutions was trifling in comparison with their number and the number of their inmates. On the other hand, it is not difficult to discover that the higher culture was very much encouraged among the women of the Renaissance.

Burckhardt<sup>1</sup> gives a very different, and, of course, far more authoritative, account of the effect of the Renaissance on

<sup>1</sup> *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*. It contains a special chapter on the position of women (section v., ch. v.).

woman's social position. He says that, if we would understand the Renaissance society, it is essential to realise that "woman was held in equal esteem with man." There is no talk among them of the "emancipation" of woman; but the absence of such phrases only means that it was *assumed* that the recovered Greek culture was equally accessible to both sexes. Women's higher education at that time was substantially the same as man's. Many women abstained from marriage in order to devote themselves more fully to culture. We find them constantly in learned conversation with men. Few turned very eagerly to art, but literature and philosophy were assiduously cultivated. The wives of the distinguished princes of the time are associated with their fame, and a "crowd" of other women became prominent—"even if their only distinction lies in their harmonious blending of grace, beauty, culture, morality, and piety." In some senses, in fact, the women of the Renaissance were exceedingly "advanced" from the modern point of view. There was the inevitable attempt to set up the Greek institution of the *hetairæ*, and many of these courtesans were highly cultured and much respected. But apart from this eccentricity there was a general consciousness of charm and of energy in the women, which was completely antithetic to the Church ideal. There was even a tendency to welcome the title "virago"; though, of course, the word had not then degenerated to our present usage of it.

This movement is very interesting in that it shows us the old Greek culture, that had promised so much for woman on the whole, reviving again in Europe and at once making for the greater freedom and culture of woman. I have

already mentioned an earlier revival of it. While Christian countries were sunk in the morass of the Middle Ages, the Moors in Spain "offered all Europe a shining example of a civilised and enlightened State," as one historian puts it. In their social order women, like the Jews, were free and respected. This Arab civilisation was, as is known, founded on Greek culture, which, inactive now in the land of its birth, had gone round by Syria to the Mohammedans, and been brought by these to Spain. In the thirteenth century direct relations with Greece began to be renewed. About the middle of the fifteenth century the Turks took Constantinople, and Greek scholars flocked to Italy. It was thus the humanist culture of the older world that lit again the hope of woman in Europe for a season. But, though prelates leaned freely enough to the new culture in its least austere forms, it was in strict antagonism to the formal ideal of the Church, and excess and disorder were bound to ensue. Lucretia Borgia must not prevent us from appreciating the better elements of the Renaissance, any more than the Messaline can be thought to stand for the women of pagan Rome. The Renaissance brought back to Europe the broader view that was characteristic of the last days of paganism. As in its first years, the Christian Church again failed in its obvious duty (as far as the cause of woman is concerned) to place the new liberty on a moral foundation and purge it of mere abuses. The Reformation in the north of Europe, and the Counter-Reformation within the Church in the south, revived the Judaic ideal in all its narrowness, and drew a veil once more over woman's prospects.

That the Church of Rome was quickly

and thoroughly purged of all tendency to a humane alleviation of the condition of woman—except through the usual narrow way of asceticism, if that can be called an alleviation—needs no lengthy proof. It was the last branch of the Christian Church in our own day to withdraw its opposition. But the question of the effect of the Reformation on woman's position is not so clear. While Mrs. Cady Stanton thinks that the Reformation "loosened the grasp of the Church upon woman, and is to be looked upon as one of the most important steps in this reform," her colleague, Mrs. Gage, says that the old idea of woman's inferiority and natural iniquity "took new force after the rise of Melancthon, Huss, and Luther." While Mr. Lecky thinks it is the great merit of Protestantism to have restored a truer view of marriage and the sex-relation, and Bebel says that "the legitimate wife, who had long since become an enemy of the Catholic sensuality of the later Middle Ages, gladly welcomed the Puritan spirit of Protestantism," we find Professor K. Pearson maintaining that the Reformation led to an increase of prostitution, and gave woman only the choice between that and a dull domestication, and that Luther's ideas encouraged sexual licence. On some points, however, the contradiction is more apparent than real.

The Reformation being, above all, a concentration of the Bible and a protest against paganism and philosophy, its general bearing on the woman-question can be almost determined in advance. Protestantism shrank in horror from the new Greek culture, or any culture that was not Biblical. Hence, as the New Testament laid down no principles on the subject, and certainly did not undo the harshness and injustice of the Old,

it was to the very clear teaching of the latter that the Reformers turned. Luther had no personal vein of refinement to correct or moderate the impression of woman left by his assiduous study of the Old Testament. He was frankly contemptuous. "No gown worse becomes a woman than the desire to be wise," he said. So fully did he and the other reformers submit to the Old Testament, where the New did not expressly abrogate it, that they were willing to permit polygamy. Milton, on our side, pointed out that the New Testament had not withdrawn this privilege of the saints. It seems indisputable that the Reformers held that low estimate of woman in herself which we should naturally expect their constant brooding over the Old Testament to engender.

But, on the other hand, Luther rendered a limited service in rejecting the old patristic and medieval nonsense about love and marriage. It is quite unjustifiable by the facts of history to say, as many do, that the preaching of virginity was advisable in the fourth century, but was very properly withdrawn in the fifteenth. This familiar sophism of our day rests on the assumption that the fourth century was much more immoral—more impenetrably immoral—than the fifteenth. Such a belief is wholly incorrect. The gospel of virginity was an unfortunate error from the first.<sup>1</sup> A contempt of marriage was the inevitable accompaniment of the praise of virginity; and this contempt of marriage not only led to the terrible disorders of

the clergy, monks, and nuns, but in its turn tended to encourage the contempt of woman. The destruction of all this fine structure by Luther was, therefore, a social and moral service. One grave excuse for licence—celibacy—was swept away, and the Protestant Churches, in setting up a more sober and rational standard of conduct, could appeal with more effect to the people.

But, partly owing to the perverse Biblical idea of woman, partly owing to economic changes which now set in, or were increased, woman does not seem to have gained much by the Reformation. Bebel admits that German women were "in general no better off than before," and Mrs. G. Hill makes the same admission for the women of England. Mrs. Gage concludes that the Reformation altered, but did not improve, the condition of women. The exclusion of women from trades and other than domestic employments was now completed. Bebel admits that this was not due to religious influences, and, as a fact, he does not realise that it was mostly accomplished long before the Reformation. Whatever the causes of it, this total restriction of women to domestic work made their life duller, stunted their capacities, and completed their fatal economic dependence on men. "What the Greeks accomplished in the age of Pericles—the domestication of woman—the Germans achieved in the age of Luther," says Professor K. Pearson. It is a perilous comparison of two very different ages, and is hardly just to the age of Pericles and Aspasia; but it expresses the fact for Germany. Whether, as Professor Pearson goes on to say, it had the effect of driving more women than ever into public disorder is very much disputed. This, at least, is clear: it

<sup>1</sup> I shall hardly be misunderstood to the extent of being thought to put the married state above the unmarried. It is a matter of taste. I am only attacking the idea that there is anything superior or elevated in physical virginity, or that there is anything inferior or in any way lowering in physical love.

robbed the life of woman of much of its remaining colour and variety, and it reduced her to the position of a mere breeder of children. Moreover, with the closing of the convents, and the prohibition of earning money in respectable fashion, a larger number of women had to remain unmarried, yet dependent on their male relatives.

This suppression of the nunneries is cast against the Reformers as an injury to the cause of women by many writers; but the opportunity of distinction or employment which the nunneries had provided is altogether exaggerated by Mdlle. Chauvin and those who deplore the suppression. That the nunneries often gave a most welcome place of retirement to distressed, or sensitive, or ill-situated women is quite clear. These, however, were a small fraction of the whole. But when the nunneries are looked upon as providing an outlet for woman's energy, and a wider than domestic interest, a still smaller fraction is taken for the whole. The amount of teaching and other philanthropic work done in medieval nunneries was exceedingly small. All the great active congregations of Catholic nuns have been founded since the Reformation. The life led in the bulk of the huge convents of the Middle Ages was one of idleness and impossibly lengthy spiritual exercises. It tended constantly to disorder. Moreover, the superiress of a small nunnery had an occupation of little interest, far less interesting than that of such a household as she would probably have presided over if she had married. The number of abbesses with real power, with positions of distinction, and with fiefs to administer (and possibly a community of monks), was very limited. It is impossible to regard this closing of

the nunneries as an important restriction of woman's sphere of interest. And the disorders it swept away were so great, the service rendered in destroying the morbid illusion that had led them to sacrifice home and pleasure was so important, that it is difficult to understand how any woman can rebuke the Reformation on this ground. As a priest, I have seen hundreds of brave and noble women struggling in nunneries to live up to their terrible ideal—most of them probably induced to make their vows before they were eighteen. I do not believe one of them would welcome an inspection of convents or a forcible suppression; but I know that, if *their own Church* would surrender the great illusion that God is pleased with all this unnatural struggle and sacrifice, there would be many happier women in the world, and happier men, and better children, than there are to-day.

On the whole, then, the Reformation made little difference to the cause of woman, and it is a stern indication of its failure to do so that "for three centuries after the Reformation the history of woman in Germany was a blank," as Professor Pearson says. German women lagged far behind their English and American sisters in demanding justice, though they make up for that to-day. In England women have always been freer than among other Christian peoples. The old Teutonic spirit never wholly yielded to the pressure of priests. In the reign of Elizabeth England is said to have been "the Paradise of women." But I must repeat that we have to beware of brilliant exceptions, either of vice, or virtue, or power. The unjust and tyrannical system which J. S. Mill described in his *Subjection of Women* had existed among us for ages. English

common law in regard to married women is a notorious instance of the distortion of a humane civic law by priestly dictation. From the time of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons woman's position deteriorated. After the Norman invasion it became much worse. In the later Middle Ages it sank lower and lower, the Throne alone being left open to her. The Reformation brought no legal relief or political interest. A statute of Henry VIII. forbade "women and others of low condition" (I quote from Mrs. Gage) to read the Bible. From Mrs. Hill's picture of this period it seems that no change took place in woman's social position; and, as on the Continent, the withdrawal of employment and closing of the nunneries made matters worse for marriageable daughters and the unmarried. For a time a higher culture was encouraged, and life became more interesting for the women of the wealthier class. But the coming of Puritanism again "obscured the clearer thought which the Renaissance had brought," as Mrs. Hill says. Once more the grim Biblical idea of woman prevailed. The Old Testament had greater influence than ever now that printing had been invented. American women, and many English women, will still have recollections from life in the new world, to which Puritanism migrated, of its influence on their position. Milton is an instructive example of its work, even on the most intelligent. With the Restoration came scepticism and licence—and the inevitable betterment of woman's social position. Nothing is more significant of the perverse attitude of priests towards woman than this constant recovery of her position in intervals of irreligion and laxity.

However, as we look back on the last

2,000 years of the social history of woman, we quickly learn that her fortunes must not be measured by this rise and fall of public opinion. Such movements are only interesting, in letting us see the character of the influences at work. The temporary improvement of public feeling brought its pleasure—the brighter life that was inaugurated by the Carolingians in France in the eighth century; by the Minnesingers in Germany in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; by the gay homage of the troubadours, or the gallantry of knights-errant, or the freedom of Tudor or Stuart or Bourbon Courts. All these things brightened her path for a time, but the swift reversal was a warning. When the coming of an eloquent preacher or the return of a serious moral consciousness meant the extinction of woman's hour of sunshine, it was time to demand a change. In every single instance of the improvement of woman's position during the Christian era the change was effected by a departure from the principles which men were understood to hold. Anything more profoundly unsatisfactory and more mischievous socially it would be difficult to conceive. The attitude of man towards woman must be grounded on principle; and it must be a principle that admits the dignity and full humanity of woman. Throughout all these changes of outward bearing towards woman, the fact of her legal, civic, political, and professional inferiority remained unchanged. It may seem to many women who are happily married a sweet thing to depend wholly on the love of the stronger sex, but all men are not angels, and the temptation to selfishness is strong; nor can anyone question the evil of virtually compelling women to seek marriage as a livelihood, or reason away their desire to have a voice in

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public affairs. "I do not like women to meddle with politics," said Napoleon unctuously to Madame Condorcet. "You are right, General," she answered; "but in a country where it is the custom to cut off the heads of women it is natural that they should wish to know the reason why."

As soon, therefore, as the coarser medieval feelings had been mastered, and the humaner spirit of the nineteenth century asserted itself, the cry of radical change in the position of woman was raised. A few isolated writers had anticipated the cry during the preceding two centuries, though these were generally sceptics or heretics. The transfer of inspiration from the Fathers and Schoolmen back to the Bible had made no difference to the cause of woman. The sex still waited for some strong voice to take up the cry where it had died away on the lips of the dying paganism. This was done in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. In country after country the strain was taken up. The old injustice must be abolished. The insult and the wrong of woman's legal and

political disabilities must be righted, and the restrictions on her education and her activity must be swept away, or at least placed on that ground and in that measure which careful experience should recommend—if it recommended any restriction at all. Was this long-delayed cry for reform due, in the cant phrase of our day, to the fact that the preceding seventeen centuries had misunderstood the Christian doctrine of woman, and the Christian Church of the nineteenth century had tardily realised it? Did the clergy at last perceive and avow the injustice of their long-drawn error? Did they take up the new-born demand for truth and equity, and throw themselves with a moral zeal into the task of undoing the evil they had wrought? How far have the women of our day, who cling so strangely to the Churches, to thank them for the great advance made in the course of the nineteenth century? It is the last stage of the first part of my inquiry into the attachment of women to traditional religion, and I approach it in a fresh chapter.

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## CHAPTER VI.

# THE CHURCHES AND THE MODERN WOMAN MOVEMENT

THE nineteenth century has been chiefly remarkable, on its moral or social side, for two tendencies—the decay of religion and the sturdy growth of justice and humanity. For the moment I do not say that these were connected tendencies; but of the fact that they are characteristic

of "the wonderful century" it seems hardly possible to doubt. The proper authorities on each subject assure us of it. The clergy declare the one, and humanitarians gladly proclaim the other. These two tendencies are wholly concerned with the inquiry we now enter upon.



For among the wrongs which the knights-errant of the last century set out to redress the subordination of woman was not the least. Men were busy undoing the industrial evils which the creation of machinery had caused. They were looking abroad to the condition of the blacks; they were shuddering at the horrors of warfare; they were stooping to consider the lot of the lower animals; they were setting the Turk's house in order; they were flashing the new search-light of a zeal for justice on the hill-tops and in the deep valleys everywhere. And suddenly a voice rang out with the peal of the clarion:—

The social subordination of women stands out as an isolated fact in modern social institutions; a solitary breach of what has become their fundamental law; a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else, but retained in the one thing of most universal interest; as if a gigantic dolmen, or a vast temple of Jupiter Olympus, occupied the site of St. Paul's, and received daily worship, while the surrounding Christian churches were only resorted to on feasts and festivals.<sup>1</sup>

Then men turned their search-light upon their own homes, and a long struggle began. It is not my place to study the new woman or the advanced woman, or in any way the discrepancy of ideals among the women of our time. I have to deal with the generally admitted fact that a great injustice has been partly remedied, and to determine the part the clergy have played during the fight. No doubt there are few who will expect to find that this great reform was initiated or very strongly supported by the clergy. A few years ago the Women's Suffrage Society published a little work that was made up of quotations from eminent living clerics in favour of women's suffrage.

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, p. 36.

A very interesting companion volume might be issued containing the expressions of the clergy of fifty years ago. However, the little work was instructive enough. It assumed that there is still a widespread feeling among Christian women that the clergy object to their having a voice in the appointment of the administrators of their country. If this is true in the early years of the twentieth century, we know what to expect in the nineteenth. Nevertheless, it is advisable to make some inquiry.

If my suggestion is correct, it will be said, the French Revolution of 1789 ought to have started the work of reform. It was the first great rebellion against clerical control. Many writers express a lively disappointment that this is not found to be the case; but it is hardly just to blame a movement that failed in its own direct issues for not succeeding in one that was, in the circumstances, bound to be regarded as a secondary issue. The conservatism of Voltaire and Rousseau, though unfortunate, is not wholly surprising. They lived in one of those periods when the real injustice to women was rather concealed behind a great deal of practical liberty and universal respect. This did not diminish with the Revolution, and so the ideas of Rousseau excited little resentment. Even so fine a woman as Madame Roland accepted them. Moreover, the work of the Revolution was terribly hampered by the financial ruin that hung without cessation over the country, and the universal and prolonged war in which the French were involved. It took years to make a constitution, and it could never be launched when it was made. Finally, the more violent factions seized the power, and made any grave constructive work like the settlement of woman's

position impossible. Several of the leaders of French thought at the time—and they among the least religious—did plead for the political equality of woman. Thus did, especially, Sieyès and Condorcet. Even many of those who set down woman as inferior said, as Diderot did, that this was possibly due to defective education, not innate, as the Church described it. However, I no more believe that every humanist is a wise man than I take every clergyman to be unwise. The opposition of such men as Mirabeau and Danton was deplorable. But the terrible and exceptional difficulties of their task may be understood to have somewhat concentrated and narrowed their energies.

It is more profitable to inquire into the actual birth and progress of the reform. It would obviously be impossible to cover the whole ground of the agitation in Europe; and, indeed, the documentary evidence has not yet been collected. Some day the women of every country will raise to the memories of their respective pioneers such a memorial as that raised by Mrs. Cady Stanton and her colleagues in America. As, however, the earlier work was chiefly done in America and England, and sufficient evidence for my purpose is available here, it will be enough to deal with them.

The story of the redress of women's wrongs in the United States is a painful story of Might endeavouring by every fair or foul means to stifle the voice of Right. It is told chiefly by Mrs. Cady Stanton, Mrs. Gage, and Miss Susan B. Anthony, in their *History of Women Suffrage*. I am only concerned with it under two aspects: with the character of those who started and bore the brunt of the battle, and with the attitude of the

clergy. There is a paragraph on page 499 of the first volume which reads only too like a summary of the whole story. Speaking of the vicious opposition which the early workers encountered in New York, the writer says: "Throughout this protracted and disgraceful assault on American womanhood the clergy baptised each new insult and act of injustice in the name of the Christian religion, and uniformly asked God's blessing on proceedings that would have put to shame an assembly of Hottentots." The clergy of New York were not, as will be understood, exceptionally stupid or reactionary. Smaller and less enlightened towns were not likely to improve on their conduct, as a rule. In fact, especially in its earlier stages, the struggle leaves an impression on one's mind as if it were a conflict of heretics and sceptics against the clergy and a laity that made equal use of the Bible.

The Americans were first compelled to face outright the question of justice to their wives and sisters by the dramatic invasion of their country by Frances Wright, an able and fearless young Scotchwoman, in 1820. She aroused the most lively interest and resentment by mounting the platform in various parts of the country and delivering a series of eloquent lectures on behalf of her sex. It was the first time a woman had addressed a public meeting in the States; the first time anyone had ventured to denounce that legal status of the American woman of which I have earlier quoted the description. The descendants of Washington's soldiers received her with expressions of horror, but the work was begun. She was shortly followed by the brilliant and charming Polish Jewess, Mrs. Ernestine L. Rose, and by the sternest fighters the

Quaker community has given to the world—Lucretia Mott, Abby Kelly, and the Grimkes. No one who has read Frances Wright's remarkable lectures *On the Nature of Knowledge*<sup>1</sup> needs to be told that she was anything but conventional in religion. She is described in the *History* as having "radical ideas in theology," as having the compliment, "infidel," cast at her wherever she went, and as numbering the clergy "among her most bitter enemies." Ernestine Rose is described as "equally liberal" in theology. Robert Dale Owen says that her scepticism went as far as disbelief in a future life. She too was hailed as an "infidel" in every part of the States, and she fully deserved the title. She was from her fourteenth year a very thorough "unbeliever" in the Bible and the theology which were set against her. The third great pioneer, Abby Kelly, was a liberal Quaker—*very* liberal, even for that undogmatic sect. Many a man and woman was expelled from the Churches for listening to her stirring addresses on the Sabbath. Her biography tells us she was "equally familiar with the tricks of priests and politicians." And the fourth great pioneer of the woman movement in America, the noble Lucretia Mott, was equally, and with equal justice, greeted as an "infidel," even by her own Quaker community. She held a vague deism, but very independent views as regards the Bible. One of the contributors to the *History* is moved to some irony when she describes a Christian writer of the time as "shuddering over the graves of such women as Harriet Martineau, Frances Wright, Mary Woll-

stonecraft, George Eliot, George Sand, and Lucretia Mott."

I will not go on to discuss the religious views of those other distinguished American women who bring the memory of the great campaign down to our day; but to judge from the writings of Mrs. Gage and Mrs. Cady Stanton, if not of Miss Anthony, I fear that the good Christian aforesaid will shudder not less painfully over their graves as well as over those of my friend, Mrs. Biddulph-Martin, and her sister, Lady Cook, or Lady Florence Dixie. But let us turn to the other side of the question, and see whether Christian orthodoxy, if it did not inspire the reformers, lent any inspiration to their opponents. This is sufficiently clear from what I have already said, but a little may be added. No one would seriously expect the Catholic clergy, with their rigid retention of medieval ideas, to countenance such a movement as this, until it had undeniably established itself; but the Protestant clergy of America were hardly less unjust. "A few of the more democratic denominations," says Mrs. Cady Stanton in the *Woman's Bible*, "accord women some privileges, but invidious discriminations of sex are found in all religious organisations, and the most bitter and outspoken enemies of women are found among clergymen and bishops of the Protestant religion." This is not quite so true of England, as we shall see, but it is not an unfair statement of the case in America, and the statement is made by one who knew. I do not find a single clerical supporter of the cry for justice to women in America until seventeen years after Frances Wright opened the campaign, and for many years after 1845 clerical supporters were very rare. The earlier and most arduous stages of the fight are

<sup>1</sup> These have lately been republished in cheap and handy form, and may be had in paper cover for 6d. from the publishers for the Rationalist Press Association.

distinguished by "infidels" and Quakers laying down their lives in restless, brilliant struggles for the cause, while the orthodox look coldly on or jeer and calumniate. When, in 1837, Abby Kelly and Lucretia Mott and the Sisters Grimke were delivering their anti-slavery lectures in Massachusetts, a special pastoral letter was circulated among the clergy urging them to denounce everywhere the new woman-movement. It called attention to "the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury," and spoke of the impending "degeneracy and ruin" of the sex. It took its stand on Scripture, it expressly stated: the New Testament, it claimed, clearly pointed out woman's true sphere. J. G. Whittier—not very orthodox—answered their pastoral letter with a poem that cut like a whip.

I have quoted the comment of the *History* on the behaviour of the clergy of New York. When these noble and gifted American women came to speak at the Anti-Slavery Convention at London, in 1840, they were preceded by a flock of these American clergymen, whose aim was to stir up the clergy of England against this dreadful ambition of a hitherto docile sex to speak in public. They succeeded in a painful degree. In a Convention gathered in the name of liberty and justice in the most enlightened city of the world, about the middle of the nineteenth century, eight American women, of superb devotion to the cause and fine oratorical gifts, had to fight for hours for the right to speak, and lost it. "She shall not speak in the convention [ἐκκλησία]," said Saint Paul. The clergy opposed them on religious grounds. One said it would be "a violation of the ordinance of Almighty God." Another

said it was against "the plain teaching of the word of God." Even so late as 1878 we find formidable attacks by the Protestant clergy, led by the President of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Rochester, on the work of the woman movement in America. The history of the cause in America bristles with them. "And to-day," says Miss Anthony, "from two-thirds to three-fourths of the members of the American Churches are women."

We have not as yet a detailed and systematic history of the campaign for justice to women in this country,<sup>1</sup> but probably when it is written it will not leave so painful an impression on the mind as does this published by the women of America. The American Church had not been shaken to the same extent by the Deistic and Unitarian attack on the supernatural idea of the Bible. Here in the practical work of effecting reforms in detail a certain amount of support was given by the clergy. But here, as everywhere else, heretics and Freethinkers gave the impulse to the reform, and the clergy generally opposed it. The names of Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Martineau should be written in red letters in the calendar, if not the canon, of every Englishwoman. When their orthodox sisters bent timidly under the yoke, they summoned them in burning words to stand erect, and make themselves as much an image of God as man was. Frances Wright, too, was a Scotchwoman and Freethinker. Moreover, a series of very able and influential English *men* supported their cause from the beginning, and these were nearly all Freethinkers. Godwin joined himself with Mary Wollstonecraft; Robert Owen

<sup>1</sup> Though the *Pioneer Women in Victoria's Reign* of Mr. Edwin A. Pratt deserves honourable mention as a modest contribution.

pleaded for this as for nearly every other conceivable social reform. Jeremy Bentham and Cobden favoured it. George Jacob Holyoake began, in 1847, to plead the cause of woman, and has not yet retired from supporting it. John Stuart Mill's powerful pen was drawn in its defence in 1869, and lent it incalculable prestige. Disraeli was one of the first statesmen to recognise its justice. Such men as these have earned the gratitude of the women of England. They trod down in scorn that ridicule and misrepresentation which a man was likely to get from his fellows in those early days; but the clergy were silent. Yet to-day so many women listen without protest to the clerical calumny that a rejection of Christianity tends to make men selfish and sensual, and devoid of idealism. It was just those who most radically abandoned Christianity—Owen, Holyoake, and Mill—that were the most logical and ungrudging in their plea for woman. It was the Mary Wollstonecrafts, Harriet Martineaus, Frances Wrights, George Eliots, Helen Taylors, and Annie Besants that distinguished themselves by fearlessness and unselfishness.

In the task of opening the reforms in detail a great number of deeply religious women were engaged, and a number of eminent clergymen, like Canon Kingsley and Dean Farrar, went to their assistance. There is no adequate and convenient history from which we can estimate the weight of the clerical opposition, but one notices, even in Mr. Pratt's sketch, recurrent traces of it. For instance, one of the most arduous reforms, workhouse nursing, was taken up by Agnes Weston, a fervent Protestant. Yet over her grave Florence Nightingale had to say: "She had disarmed all opposition, all sectarian zealotism, so that Roman Catholic and

Unitarian, High Church and Low Church, all literally rose up and called her blessed." Elizabeth Fry found hardly any but the Atheist, Robert Owen, to support her at first in what was strictly and properly a moral reform. The fundamental reforms of opening employment to women, and of the more rational education of women, were led by Miss Martineau; but there is no need to go into detail. The battle was begun by Freethinkers in defiance of the clergy. The conservative defence was largely based on the religious conception of "woman's sphere," as was so clearly shown in the clerical speeches at the Anti-Slavery Convention. The women of England were slow to respond, because of the ideas the clergy had instilled into them: it has been found necessary in our own time to issue a book for the purpose of meeting this difficulty. And the state of the controversy in our own day sufficiently suggests what it must have been in the days of weakness and poverty. What proportion of the women-writers and women-workers of to-day belong to any orthodox Church? What proportion of the clergy support women in the remaining struggle for the suffrage, for public offices, for the learned professions, for university degrees?

On the continent there has been the same story of general clerical opposition and general heterodox support. Michelet and George Sand occupy in France the places of J. S. Mill and George Eliot. Saint-Simon, and Fourier, and the Communists supported the cause of woman, and the anti-clerical Socialists advocate it to-day. "In France," says Signora Melegari, "those who take the woman question most seriously are, in general, Protestants or Freethinkers"; but the Protestants are a minority of

800,000 in a population of 40,000,000, mostly of no religion. In Germany Max Stirner, and Büchner, and other "infidels," raised the cry. Marx, and Engels, and Bebel, and Liebknecht, Freethinking Socialists, sustained it with vigour, and their great Social Democratic movement spreads it among the people. In Scandinavia Ibsen and Björnson shattered the religious prejudice against it. In Spain none but a Freethinker will take it seriously. In Italy "the influence of religion has tended to keep the Italian woman in check in the competition of the sexes," says Signora Melegari. To-day, while the head of Catholic Christendom issues medieval decrees about the divinely-ordained character of the existing framework of society, the Italian Freethinkers and Socialists encourage woman to rebel.

Thus we are bound to conclude that the righting of the most undoubted wrongs to which woman has been subjected has been started and has proceeded, not only without the aid of the Churches, but in face of their determined opposition. While non-Christian bodies (such as the International Union of Ethical Societies) have officially endorsed the cry of the women, no Christian body of even the thinnest dogmatic texture has ever officially entertained it, though they have often officially opposed it. While an enormous proportion of the heterodox writers and speakers of the nineteenth century have supported it, the clergy have proved its most bitter opponents. No Catholic priest has ever worked for it: few clergymen of the great Protestant bodies have even so much as assured their nervous followers, until these later days, that they were free to join it. Let us be perfectly clear as to what this means. There is an idea

abroad, among women with the more moderate ambition for their sex, that atheists and heretics sought to propagate their own views by turning women into viragos, and that the clergy were bound to oppose such a manoeuvre. This is a gross calumny on men to whom the women of our day owe much. The men I have spoken of were moved by a plain and stirring resentment of a great injustice. The clergy opposed the reform on the plain and expressed ground that woman was divinely and scripturally commanded to remain in the home.

Nor may it be supposed for a moment that the struggle between those early pioneers of the women's cause and the clergy was similar to that which divides women to-day between two or more different ideals. There are those who feel that the grace of womanhood cannot be preserved except by a continued dependence on the strength of the man; who, while regretting any word about inferiority, and claiming a certain freedom for woman to win distinction in art or science or letters, would nevertheless keep her from the hardening fields of public service and professional or industrial life. There is an æsthetic ground for this ideal which should command our respect, even if we think it erroneous. On the other hand, an increasing number of men and women are convinced that the dignity of woman will not suffer by engaging in the public service or in the work of earning her own livelihood; they claim that the restriction to home-life is an insinuation of inferiority, and that all the doors of all professions, academies, crafts, and branches of public service should be thrown wide open, so that we may learn by the simple device of serious and sustained experiment what woman is or is not capable of doing

without hurt. This is a familiar antithesis of ideals, with every shade of intervening opinion, and it does not fall within my plan to discuss it.<sup>1</sup>

But it would be a serious error to suppose that *this* was the controversy that divided women-workers and their friends from the clergy in the nineteenth century. Those very clergymen who sided with the reformers, such as Farrar and Kingsley, held the domestic ideal of womanhood. The fight was for the removal of a most serious and palpable injustice. The legal position of women, especially married women, was indefensible; the right to discuss their position in public was virtually denied; the power to take any constitutional step towards the alteration of the law was withheld; the education given to them was absurd and offensive; their economic dependence on men was so rigid as to be openly demoralising. The Church was largely responsible for the long survival of this system in Europe. The Church was—all our witnesses have stated it—the chief impediment in the way of moderating the injustice. In spite of the fact that for years now educated clergymen have known the far from supernatural source of those Old Testament ideas and practices which occasioned the injustice, few of them have helped to remove it. The agitation for its removal, especially in the earlier years, was so purely secular and practically anti-clerical as to present a distinctly heterodox character. All honour to the memory of those clergymen who, like Kingsley and Farrar, protested against the injustice to the full extent of their ideal of woman-

hood. But their lives do not redeem the sin or the apathy of the Churches; they do not heal the bruises or undo the suffering of those many religious women who were torn between allegiance to their beliefs and to their sex and humanity. The clergy never *discovered* any injustice to woman; and only one in a thousand could see it when it was pointed out.

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The first part of my inquiry is at an end. I have investigated the ground for the contention that Christianity has laid on woman a burden of gratitude, and that we may find in this some explanation of her peculiar clinging to its hierarchy and its institutions. I have examined the position that woman occupied in Europe, and the prospect that lay before her at the time when Christianity began to influence legislation and the social order. I have studied closely the conception of woman's nature and education and work which the most influential leaders of the Church presented. I have sought the immediate effect of this teaching on the position and ambition of the women of Europe, and I have traced the development of its influence as the centuries passed and the power of the Church rose to absolute despotism. Finally, I have described the tardy revolt against the long injustice, and determined the part which the Church played in relation to it. It seems fair to give this summary of the story.

In what is called the "pagan" world the position of woman, which had fallen low, was steadily and solidly improving. The pagan moralists had come to recognise and proclaim that woman was unduly subordinated. Public opinion

<sup>1</sup> But I may take the occasion to express my entire acceptance of the latter ideal. However, I am writing now as a Rationalist, and must not linger to defend it.



at Rome was strongly against the old restrictions on her life. The juriconsults and legislators were removing the old disabilities. The Empire had passed beyond the period of licence, and in its more sober mood still upheld the reform. But the old religion was quite dead as a moral force, and had clearly to be replaced. A half-dozen religions, all spiritual and elevating, were ready to take up the moral and social action it had ceased to exercise. All of these, except Christianity, seemed to be in sympathy with the new turn of woman's fortunes. They had issued from Greece, or Persia, or Egypt, while Christianity came forth from a country where woman was despised. But Christianity contrived to win the power, and it used the military force of the converted emperors to crush the last pulse of life out of its rivals. Meantime its leaders had erected the inspiration of the Old Testament into a dogma, and the shadow of the Hebraic ideal fell upon Europe. The efforts of the pagan moralists were decried and rejected; the excellent ideal of the Teutonic tribes was allowed to perish.

From the chaotic mixture of the disrupted Empire and the invading peoples emerged at last the strange and semi-barbaric structure of feudal and Christian Europe. From the new legal system the elements which had been more favourable to woman in the Germanic customs and the later Roman code were gradually expelled. Woman fell to a lower position in law than she had occupied in Greece, in Rome, or in the Germanic systems. Competent authorities like Sir Henry Maine attribute this to the influence of Church law, which was grossly unjust to and biassed against woman. Monastic and priestly writers and the decrees of episcopal councils had

the same influence on public opinion and social life. The increasing stress laid by the Church on asceticism and celibacy, with the widespread disorder which followed by a very natural reaction, still further prejudiced the position of woman. The theological theory of her inferiority became a fixed principle in the law and literature and life of Europe. Here and there her lot was relieved for a time by the gaiety of troubadours, or the devotion of knights-errant, or admission into the medieval guilds and crafts, or a share in the growing culture or the glamour of court-life. These were hours of sunshine in a long, gray day. They were always won in defiance of the ruling creeds, and generally associated with a relaxation of morals or a revival of pagan culture. The Reformation brought no material change in her condition. Her insulting legal disabilities, her habitual exclusion from the means of self-support and of culture, and her utter exclusion from civic or political rights, lasted from the sixth to the nineteenth century.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth a determined attack was made on the unjust system of disabilities. In nearly every case the campaign was begun by radical heretics or Freethinkers. In no case was it begun by clergymen. In most cases the clergy gave no word of sympathy until the first odium and bitterness of the struggle had been lived down. In all countries the opposition was largely placed on religious grounds, and was, to a painful extent, led by the clergy; though the question then was of little more than a vague and elementary claim on the part of women to draw public attention to their position and discuss the justice or injustice of it. To-day,

although even Christian scholarship has denuded the Old Testament of all authority to rule us, there is an extraordinary unwillingness among the clergy to undo what remains of the evil that their groundless dogmas have caused.

I conclude that the suggestion that gratitude is due to the Church from women is little short of grotesque. Only a reckless perversion of their social

history could suffer it to be entertained for a moment. The clergy have been the worst enemies of women. Women are their best friends to-day. If women lent them no more support than men do, they would cease to be a serious influence in Europe. We must seek elsewhere the ground of their peculiar attachment to the Christian Church.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE RELIGIOUS INSTINCT

IF no class in the community has suffered so much as women by the errors of the Christian teaching, we shall expect to find a proportionately greater strength in the grounds for their peculiar attachment to it. Men have been unduly favoured by the introduction of Judaic ideas into Europe, yet men do not show to-day any excessive loyalty to the passing religion. It is their wives and sisters who lend the chief support to it. The familiar visitor from Mars would survey the condition of our Churches with some perplexity if he were acquainted with the social history of women. Let us put ourselves in the neutral position of our mythic visitor, and seek the roots of woman's stricter retention of the ideas which have prolonged her subordination.

The chief reason we encounter, after undoing the historical fallacy we have studied, seems to be a suggestion that the religious sense or religious instinct is stronger and more imperious in woman. This is not a new idea, nor one quite

devoid of foundation. I have spoken of the great reverence with which our forefathers regarded her. It was largely due to a belief that she was nearer to the gods than themselves, and more fitted to receive and interpret the vague messages that came from beyond. There have been religions in which the priests have had to make themselves as unmanlike as they could in preparation for their sacred functions. The fuller attention that men paid to the material interests of the family and the city or nation is one obvious explanation of what has been called their less spiritual texture. They have had to delegate the spiritual functions to women and priests. But there is also a radical difference in nerve-structure between the sexes, and this inevitably means a difference in what is called "soul," or psychic functions. Mr. Havelock Ellis, who is not unfriendly to women, concludes, after careful inquiry, that woman is ineradicably more emotional than man. Throughout nature it is

indispensable that the mother should have a finer and quicker sensibility than the father. But whether this greater emotional power is ineradicable or no, it is an actual fact; and in it we have a positive ground to start from in studying the different religious tendencies of men and women.

For a very slight examination will show that the religious sense is rightly associated with the emotions. There are those who would connect it with what is called—especially by novelists—a woman's "intuition." A superficial view of woman's mind-life has given rise to the idea that she has this power of intuition more fully developed than man. It is a favourite device of the novelist to save a situation by a flash of his heroine's "intuition." Where the reasoning of a Sherlock Holmes fails to penetrate, she *sees* the solution which will rescue her lover or husband. It is pretty well agreed by modern psychologists that this is really only a quicker process of reasoning. Intuition means direct vision. One sees the fact or truth, without having to gather it from other facts or truths. Now, in these situations the solution *must* have been gathered from other indications, but the mind has stepped so rapidly from them to the conclusion that they have not remained in the memory. It was a swift process of reasoning; and, if the attempt is made afterwards, the steps or stages of it may generally be recovered. But the religious sense is not at all a process of reasoning, as every one who possesses it will say. It is a real, not a fictitious, intuition. It cannot be resolved, by the most strained reflection, into an inference from something else.

We must approach the analysis of it from another side. Why analyse it at

all? many will ask. Why may they not go through life with this treasured vision, though it be denied to so many about them? For this very plain reason: the mind is beset on every side with error and illusion, and it is a matter of elementary prudence to examine our beliefs. There never were such searchers after truth as the old Greeks, yet they concluded that truth hid at the bottom of a deep well, while error lay by every roadside. People would seem at times anxious to persuade themselves—so heavy is the pressure of modern thought—that this question of the truth or untruth of their beliefs does not vitally matter. No? You are content to sit in church, hour by hour, while solemn worship is offered to an invisible Being; to teach your child to kneel and lisp a prayer of direct address to a Deity; to put yourself in an attitude of abject entreaty; to build altars and temples, and support a clergy, and all the rest—and say it does not matter whether there is a God or not, and that you do not care to inquire seriously if it be so? The question has only to be put in this plain form to elicit an answer at once. Religious women do care—care deeply and anxiously—if their belief is true. But to care very seriously if one's belief is true, and to refuse to make any inquiry into the grounds of it, is a strange procedure.

Religious people are misled by this not unnatural confusion. All about them to-day there is question of "evidences" for Christianity and religion. In any magazine and journal, in the train or the drawing-room, on every bookstall, the restless inquiry is apt to break on them. And they say very often: We do not need to wander through these labyrinthine evidences, because we have a strong inner sense of the truth of our

religion. They somehow fail to see that this inner sense itself should be looked at a little before they trust it to guide them on such momentous issues. I do not say it has to be *proved*. It may be a sense that *sees* things, and seeing is better than proving. We cannot prove the things we hold for most certain, such as our own existence. Nothing could be proved, if everything had to be proved. You must have a fixed point on which to hang your chain of reasoning. It is one of many foolish misrepresentations of the Rationalist to say that he wants everything proved. What he does want is that we face manfully the grounds of our convictions, whether they take the form of proof or not. Once upon a time people believed in dreams as intuitions of the future. We do not to-day. The ground of the conviction is unworthy of our trust. At other times they trusted the authority of theologians. Here, again, we have all come to think the ground insufficient. So, when people tell us they have an inner sense or vision, we suggest that it ought to be examined before being trusted. Otherwise a religious person practically says: My conviction is true because it is a strong one. I am anxious to believe, and to teach my children, only what is true; but I decline to look further into the ground on which I do believe these things. This would be neither intelligent nor religious—if it is true that religion implies a high moral standard.

Now let us approach the subject from a rather distant standpoint. We Europeans are the children of races which have held religious convictions for incalculable ages. I say Europeans, because the question of this religious sense would not apply in the same way to some other

races. In China or Japan educated people hardly know what it is. They have all been Agnostics for centuries. But in Europe widespread Agnosticism did not set in until comparatively recently. Through the very words for God and soul in our language we can learn that religious belief was universal long before history began. Humanity is more than 200,000 years old, though when it first framed religious conceptions is quite unknown. It is safe to think that our fathers have seen and worshipped God in the heavens, and dreamed dimly of a future life, for tens of thousands of years.

There is no ground for thinking that ideas like these are transmitted from father to son. In fact, the whole question of heredity is very much unsettled just now, owing to a serious controversy as to whether acquired characteristics are transmitted or no. If, however, you take a long enough perspective, it is clear that the transmission takes place, and we need not go into the question of the medium of transmission. The duckling takes to the water, and the chicken pecks the corn, by an inherited disposition. The new-born infant sucks the breast owing to a similar inherited tendency. Thousands of instincts are explained by psychologists in this way. If you look at a number of modern manuals of psychology on the subject of instinct, you will find that most of them explain it to be an inherited habit or disposition. One of the latest manuals, Professor Villa's *Contemporary Psychology*, which purports to give the ruling opinion on each point, thus defines instinct; and most of the other manuals I have consulted bear it out.

This has clearly a curious connection.

with the point we are considering. Psychologists will require a great deal more evidence before they lay it down that *ideas* are transmitted from parents to children, as features are transmitted, for instance, or racial characteristics. But it is now quite admitted that every idea has a counterpart in the structure of the brain. Some cellule, or group of cellules, or even part of a cellule, is built in a certain way to correspond to a certain idea. And when an idea burns itself deep into the structure, as the image of God must have done in the long ages during which it absolutely dominated the mental life, and is passed on through unnumbered generations with perfect docility, we may very well believe there is a definite mark in the nerve-tissue corresponding to it. Why this should not be transmitted, like those modifications of nerve-structure which make the infant suck or the duck swim, it is difficult to see. At all events, we come to this pass: the religious sense acts so similarly to these automatic movements that we have agreed to call it instinct, and instinct is, we are told, only an inherited disposition of the nervous or other structure.

I am only putting this forward as a thought that naturally occurs to one in connection with the phrase "religious instinct." Psychologists are still too undecided about the transmission to children of ideas or memories to allow an honest thinker to put it absolutely. But the mere recalling of these principles must give serious ground for reflection on the religious sense. One may decide off-hand that it is not a natural phenomenon at all, and so eludes all explanation. It is always easy to make assertions. But the only possible ground for such an assertion as this would be that,

after a searching inquiry, no natural interpretation of it could be discovered. I do not mean that even then we should be justified in saying that the religious sense was something supernatural—what we cannot explain to-day our children or grandchildren may easily explain to-morrow, as the past has shown—but then there would be some shade of reason in the assertion. As it is, we find that the people who are most ready to invoke the supernatural are just those who have taken least pains to understand the natural working of forces. If we wish to hold our opinions intelligently and with a proper regard for the dignity of truth, we are bound to consider our feelings and views from every side. And it is clear that we have here a group of well-known facts with an important bearing on the religious sense. Age after age this belief in Deity has eaten into the heart and brain of humanity. During periods far longer than the whole stretch of history this belief was the very centre of human life. Think of the dread worship of Moloch, when (as you read in the thrilling pages of Flaubert's *Salammbô*) the mother cast her child into the fiery bosom of the brazen image; think of the ghastly worship of Tetzcatlipoca, when the father offered his fairest daughter for the sacrificial knife (you have probably read Haggard's *Montezuma's Daughter*), and the mother gave her babe to supply blood for the sacrament; think of the human sacrifices of our Druid ancestors and the ancestors of nearly every civilised nation. Think, again, of the wild child-like eyes that saw the finger of God in every stir of leaf or river, in every cloud and thunder-bolt, in every sickness and insanity, in every good gift and evil fortune of life. And when the change to Christianity came, and the image of

God rose in some majesty above the idols of the past, did it burn into the more refined natures with less piercing force? Shall all this have gone on for ages and left no impression on the very fabric of the mind? Would it be strange if, when so many habits of life have left in the organism those hereditary traces which we call instincts, all this supreme concern about the supernatural (not an abstract idea, but an image of terrible concreteness, with a torrent of accompanying emotions) has worn a little niche in the mental structure that craves at times for its statue?

For it must be realised that this religious sense is nothing more than a bias or disposition, and it is rarer than religious people think. Newman speaks in his *Grammar of Assent* of the spontaneous appearance of this instinct in the child. It is absurd to suppose that any such instinct appears except in children who have been brought up in a religious atmosphere; and in such an environment the seed may have been at any moment planted from without. The children of Agnostic mothers—and they are numerous enough to-day—do not show a trace of this instinct. I know women who have been brought up without any religious training, and the belief in God has always appeared to them, in face of the squalor and misery of life, an incomprehensible superstition. So it is even with those of us who for years gave the chief place in our life to the thought of God. To say that any large proportion of those who part with it still feel a craving for it, or an instinct feeling hungrily out for it, is merely a reckless fiction. If I may speak of my own experience, I was for years struggling to protect my belief from invading doubts, and building about it buttresses of

argument. But from the day when I was compelled in common honesty to acknowledge that my struggle was vain, and that I did not believe in God, the clouds rolled away. My mental peace has never since been broken by any doubt or fear or faintest craving in its regard. Speaking from a very wide experience of others who have abandoned religion, I say that St. Augustine's famous phrase, "Our heart is unquiet until it rests in Thee," is only the expression of the personal experience of a very few. Moreover, we must make allowance for the power of external suggestion, and, when we do honestly attempt this, "religious instinct" almost vanishes into thin air. Think of the mental environment in which a woman's mind unfolds, and try to measure the force of the incessant raining of the thought of God upon it. As soon as the child begins to disentangle the confusion of images and words on its mental screen, it is made to set aside one image and one word as belonging to something unique and dominating. Then come the early prayers, the dramatic church-service, the story-books that are full of God and his white-winged angels, the uniquely-treated clergyman, the school with God as the chief element of its discipline, the confirmation and marriage-service, the church as the pleasantest centre of social life—the drip, drip, drip, year in year out, throughout the whole of life. What is there in the "religious sense" that all this persistent suggestion (I am using the word in its strict psychological meaning) cannot account for? How can we ever honestly say that we can set aside the cumulative and most complex action of all this education in the thought of God, and still find a native sense or instinct or intuition to be accounted for?

It would tax the acuteness of the finest psychologist, or mind-student, to achieve it. Certainly, when we put together the hereditary bias towards religion which seems quite likely to be felt at times, and the effect of education and environment, we have material enough for the making of a conviction that would seem to be innate and imperious and independent of proofs.

But why should these influences affect woman more deeply than man? Because, as every authority on the psychology of woman says, she is more imaginative, more emotional, and more sensitive to suggestion than man; and because her education is still totally different from his. It is no part of my plan to discuss whether the differences between man and woman are natural or artificial, permanent or alterable. They are facts of actual experience, and they are too obviously connected with the matter of my inquiry to be neglected. I am not for a moment supposing that woman is inferior to man because she is more imaginative and emotional. It is another of the absurd misrepresentations of Rationalists which women are given, to say that we underrate the value of emotion. The four finest poets of England to-day—Meredith, Swinburne, Watson, and Hardy—are Rationalists. Meredith and Hardy have on occasions sent letters of sympathy to the Rationalist Press Association; and the work of Watson and Swinburne is well known. There is no antithesis whatever, or the slightest mutual hostility, between reason and emotion. George Eliot was hardly less poetic than Adelaide Proctor. A Rationalist may or may not be emotional, but he knows that emotion has its honoured place in life. He does not at all resemble that bloodless being whom

Professor James calls "the Rationalist" in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. He calls himself the champion of reason, because in the past reason has been too little consulted, and authority and emotion too much, in the formation of beliefs. Undoubtedly he admits that there are more things in life than reason, because there are more tasks in life than the formation of opinions.<sup>1</sup>

Let us see, then, how far we have got in our inquiry into the disposition which seems to make woman peculiarly conservative and uncritical of religious beliefs. There is, in the first place, the hereditary bias which we may expect to find at times on account of the long ages through which the idea of God has worked its way unresisted into the very fabric of the mind. This would be, if we consult the general research of psychologists, so feeble that a direct and reasoned opposition, or the lack of educative stimuli, or a strong diversion of one's concern, would easily neutralise it. But woman's nature is so much more imaginative and sensitive and awake to mystic influences—woman's education has ever been, and largely is to-day, so little adapted to strengthen the reason, and so much calculated to foster her imaginativeness and emotionalism, that we may look more confidently for traces of such instinctive bias in her than in man. Her environment from the earliest years of consciousness is more saturated with religious ideas than that of her brother, and she is more susceptible to the suggestive force of ideas. She is less

<sup>1</sup> Women who think it more profitable to ask the Rationalist himself what he means than to consult people who resent the name with suspicious violence, will receive every attention from the Secretary of the Rationalist Press Association, 5 and 6, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.



aggressive and daring than man, and so less apt to follow radical and critical views. Men, even men who have no religious belief themselves, have conspired to keep doubt and criticism away from her under a vague notion that it would undermine her obedience to them, or, less selfishly, that no alternative to a religious influence in the training of children had been provided. Woman, too, has always been brought into closer touch with the clergy, whose parochial visiting generally lies among women, and whose romantic position has always appealed to them with greater force. A dozen other circumstances which have tended to protect and strengthen woman's religious convictions more than man's will readily occur to any person who reflects. Moreover, it must be remembered that it is chiefly in the ritualist branches of Christianity and among educated people that the excess of women over men is most noticeable. In these the æsthetic character of the worship must be allowed to go a very long way towards explaining the disproportion. A careful observer will find that poetry appeals to the sexes in just the same disproportion as religion does. This is a fatal difficulty to any suggestion of a specific religious sense in woman.

In a word, the differences of nature, education, and environment are so great in the two sexes, and especially in those social classes where the disproportion in Church-membership is greatest, that it is absurd to seek any further explanation. There is no room whatever for believing that some mystic faculty or other is granted to woman in more generous measure than to man. It will be noticed that I do not even entertain the notion that she has merited this, or that she more effectually protects her "religious

sense" by a higher standard of character. Criminologists like Lombroso do not find woman to be less criminal, when all is considered, than man. I do not think any woman will seriously make such a claim for her sex. I only refer to it on account of the very offensive and insulting suggestion so often made by clerical writers that there is some connection between the two. I am dealing on its intellectual merits with the greater disposition of woman than man for religious beliefs; and I submit that all the influences I have indicated, the real action of which cannot be gainsaid, fully account for what is called woman's "religious sense."

It seems preferable always to seek a clear, natural explanation rather than merely to label a phenomenon with a mystic and unilluminating phrase. But there is a more important point to these observations. We started with the idea of examining the ground of religious conviction in order to appreciate its force or validity. We are now in a position to see the frailty of what is called the religious sense as a basis for belief. The moment we analyse it, it dissolves into a score of influences which bear with them no guarantee whatever of the truth of the conviction they generate. The fact that men have for ages believed in God, and that a large proportion of our neighbours still hold that belief, is a peculiar ground for retaining it ourselves. Yet this is all the evidential value we can extract from all the elements which go to make up the religious sense, in so far as it is an unreasoning and seemingly innate impulse. In fact, even if one does not accept such an analysis of the religious sense, it remains a quite unreliable support until we have proof of its validity. There is nothing so hopelessly confused as the

claim of religious people—men and women—that they know things by “faith.” They cannot possibly mean, and do not mean, anything else than that they have a strong inner conviction of the truth of religious doctrine. As to the grounds or sources of that conviction they seem to be wholly indifferent; yet it is surely obvious that to retain a conviction because it is strong, or because one cannot trace its sources (while declining to look closely for them), is a complete reversal of all sane procedure. This is exactly the position of the person who relies on the religious sense or religious instinct.

In fine, let me repeat that I am chiefly pleading for thoughtfulness and consideration. The resolve to enwrap oneself in a mystic and groundless belief in the authority of faith or the religious sense is self-condemned. Reason we

know from experience to be a serviceable and generally reliable implement. Faith has not only no such empirical guarantee, but it is obviously capable of being dissolved into a score of familiar agencies. We know that these agencies do enter more deeply into the life of woman than that of man, and so need not be surprised that she seems to have a greater share of this religious sense. It is only mystic as long as one refuses to examine it. Once the inquiry is patiently made—and it is difficult to see on what moral ground inquiry can be refused—it may, as I have suggested, turn out to be only the cumulative effect of hereditary and outer influences, which not only does not dispense from examination of the evidences for religion, but should make woman especially eager to guard herself against an irrational admission of its power.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

IF there is no ground for the notion of an especial indebtedness of woman to the Christian religion, and if we cannot discover, in what is called her “religious instinct,” any justification whatever for her attachment to the Churches, we must pursue our inquiry along other lines. It will, of course, be understood that I am not denying the very real and quite honest share which the two preceding motives have in the religion of woman. I have from the first disclaimed the idea that she merely acquiesces, out of mental

indolence, in religious tradition. Yet it must be said that women are less careful than they should be to *examine* the grounds on which they know their beliefs to rest. It is a duty to oneself, one's children, and humanity to see that our convictions are well founded. The progress of the race turns very largely on the elimination of error and injustice from life. Women must contribute to this. They must realise that, as both history and psychology teach, they are essentially the conservatives of the race.

This fact imposes on them a sterner duty to reflect on their beliefs and sift out error. Only thus can they fully expect that intellectual respect which men are increasingly anxious to pay them to-day. Therefore I plead for inquiry and discussion. Religious teaching, remember, has no peculiar sanctity *until it is known to be true*. This sounds very commonplace and obvious; but it is an undeniable fact that, in a confused and tortuous way, very many people make the sacredness of religion a plea for evading inquiry and discussion as to its truth, and so commit a most deplorable and foolish inversion.

However, there is one further root of the attachment of women to the Churches that we have to examine before there can be profitable question of discussing evidences. Many women are convinced that it will be impossible to train children without the aid of Christian, or at least Theistic, teaching. Indeed, as I have already said, many men, even men with no religious belief, have sought to keep unsettling controversies away from women on this ground. The training of the character of children is a task of great difficulty and delicacy, and there can be no question that a sincere and lasting belief in God—as it is held by the more liberal and humane Christians of our day—can be effectively used in it. It is not surprising that mothers hesitate to enter the dangerous field of religious inquiry, when they know of no alternative to the religious incentives to right conduct. There is a genuine dismay at what they think to be a most serious loss of deterrent and educative thoughts. But here again I submit that women do not reflect enough, do not read enough, and do not inquire enough, on the problem. Let us see if there is any

truth in the suggestion that the training of children is seriously endangered by the abandonment of its religious elements.

However, I must first enter a protest against the modern attempt to erect what Emerson called “the cowardly doctrine of consequences” into a principle. I respect the anxiety of a mother who fears to lose the help of religion in the training of her child; but I think the attempt of certain recent writers to lay it down as a comfortable maxim that the question of the truth or untruth of Christianity must give way to the question of its practical use is a most mischievous proceeding. When George Eliot was asked once why she attacked the belief in immortality, she replied, “Because it is a lie.” Every one of her great Rationalist colleagues had a splendid ideal of the dignity and power of truth. While they were being calumniated by the clergy, while frenzied cries were being raised about the materialistic consequences of their teaching, they were urging upon England a lofty ideal of sincerity and truth, which the clergy were to a great extent practically outraging. I remember how Dr. Mivart, in his Catholic days, wrote a work in which on one page he gave the usual warnings about the evil consequences of Agnosticism, and on another page actually railed at J. S. Mill for his excessive idealism! So to-day, while Rationalists are fighting for the pure ideal of sincerity and truthfulness, their opponents are pleading for the “materialistic” doctrine of consequences, and the clergy are betraying on every side the insincerity into which they are driven. It is a just Nemesis.

For consider how such a moral theory is bound to work out, and how it is

actually working. It is suggested that we should retain the Christian system as a moral discipline, whether it be true or no. There is a certain plausibility about this as an abstract proposition, but picture it in actual life. Our ministers shall be told to continue their solemn addresses to the Deity with every gesture and sign of real belief: the Mass or the Communion service shall be gravely performed: our preachers shall continue to talk in accents of particular seriousness of a personal God and Heaven and Hell and the Incarnation and Atonement, and all the rest. And these men, doing this in theatrical insincerity, we shall continue to regard—nay, it will now be their one title to existence and respect—as the moral and spiritual element of the community. We shall teach our children to say prayers and tell them we believe in God and Heaven; and we shall imagine that we are in this way sustaining our own moral dignity as parents and teachers, and laying the foundations of moral dignity in them! Was there ever a more deplorable outrage on moral training than this last desperate shift of religious apologetics? It is beyond the paradoxes of Gilbertian opera. It will be said that the idea is rather to arrest the progress of criticism, and leave the Churches free to recover the lost ground. That is to say, we informed people, who know or suspect these things to be untrue, shall encourage a set of religious teachers to remain in deliberate ignorance, and bring up a fresh generation in the same ignorance; and we shall carefully fence about their ignorance lest some stray ray of truth ever penetrate and unsettle it; and we shall make believe to share it on occasion, and strictly keep to ourselves the truths we have learned. Certainly the twentieth

century is hearing some strange gospels.\*

To all this miserable shuffling Rationalism opposes the gospel of sincerity. It is too often forgotten, apparently, that there is a connection between truth and truthfulness. We seem to fancy, sometimes, that we may pride ourselves on our truthfulness, yet encourage falseness, or at least encourage that shrinking from inquiry which is suspiciously close to it. Or we seem to think that we can confine insincerity to one particular department of life, where it is thought to have a certain use, and be in all other respects honourable men. This is impossible for most of us. It is absurd to think that we can foster or connive at insincerity in one part of life and not find it extending to the others; and, when that one department of life in which we would suffer falseness is the very province of moral culture itself, we are perpetrating a folly and an outrage. Truth cannot thrive on lies. Men do not gather grapes from thistles: nor sincerity and honour from such fictitious culture as this.

But all this modern philosophy is a fabrication of men, not women. I only allude to it because it is sought to include women as its chief victims. I proceed to deal with that sincere and honourable concern which so many mothers feel, with all respect to the dignity of truth, at the suggestion that they should part with the most forcible elements of the child's training. And first let me draw attention to the fact that this anxiety is no new thing in the history of religion. An interesting light is thrown on it by the experience of preceding changes.

\* Those who doubt the reality of such teaching will find it expressly urged in Mr. W. H. Mallock's *Religion as a Credible Doctrine*, and quite plainly included in the philosophy of Professor James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Professor Schiller's *Humanism*.

The cry was raised long ago, when the Reformers attacked the sacramental system of the dominant creed. They were told that they were endangering the moral culture of Europe. This sacramental system, it was said, has become so entirely and organically a part of the moral life of the people that you cannot tear it away without causing grave moral disorder. How—we can fancy a mother of those troubled days asking herself—how can the child be influenced if you take away the strong curb of the confessional, or the piercing ideal of the communion? But the Reformers swept the sacramental system out of one-half of Europe, and there was no moral deterioration. The Bible then became the chief ground of moral culture; and, when Deists and Unitarians set out to destroy the belief in the supernatural character of the Bible, the same anxiety was expressed. How can you remove this ground of our structure of moral discipline, and not bring it down in ruin? But the idea of there being a supernatural authority in the Bible has gone from the minds of most people, and there has been no moral deterioration. The same fear was expressed, and in louder tones than ever, when the attack on the conventional idea of hell and heaven began. Surely this doctrine, so vitally involved in the sanctions of conduct, could not be abandoned without harm? And, again, the great majority of the people of England have discarded the belief, and have suffered no moral deterioration.

It is, in fact, far too little to say that there was no moral deterioration. There was moral improvement. The average level of morality has not been higher in Europe for many ages than it is to-day. It was probably higher in the earlier stages of Greek or Roman or Egyptian

civilisation. But it has not been higher in any other century of the Christian era; and it was far lower in the period when the power of the Christian Church was greatest. In the course of the nineteenth century there has been a steady improvement. The picture of English life in the eighteenth century which Sir Leslie Stephen prefixes to his *English Utilitarians* fully shows this; and I have already quoted Sir Walter Besant's opinion to the same effect. Our commercial and imperialist age has brought its own difficulties; but the general standard of personal morality, among rich and poor, is higher than it was a hundred years ago. And in the space of that hundred years the influence of the clergy has steadily shrunk. It is quite clear that religious beliefs which seem to be the very foundations of moral life can be dispensed with; and it is clear that the humanist moral culture that comes to take their place is remarkably effective. Nor may we ignore the fact that the rise of this humanist culture brings with it a new extension of morality which had hitherto almost been neglected. Our age is characterised by the growth of a strong demand for justice and humanity in the whole of our social order. The mitigation, and if possible suppression, of the horrors of war, the improvement of the condition and homes and education of the workers, the cry of justice to woman, the prevention of cruelty to animals and children, the cessation of the practice of persecuting men for their opinions, the wiser and more humane treatment of criminals and paupers—these are all peculiarly modern reforms. It is absurd to say that they are due to the tardy appreciation of Christian principles. They have grown as Christianity shrunk.

Therefore it seems strange to raise again to-day the cry that any particular religious belief is necessary for maintaining good character. The plain truth is that the Christian faith has never had more than a very restricted moral action on the world. It has produced saints of heroic fibre and the most noble character. It has helped great numbers of people in every generation to realise a fair ideal of conduct. But it has never succeeded in deeply influencing more than a small minority of its people. I have said enough in the course of the preceding historical chapters to justify this, and am not eager to reopen the subject. Drunkenness, vice, cruelty, violence, and fraud have abounded in every age. The religious woman shrinks from such a study; she would cling to her belief in the efficacy of Christian teaching, yet refuse to examine if history supports her belief. I can only repeat that the plain testing of that belief by the facts of history and contemporary life yields a very different result. Take those sections of the community where Rationalist ideas have as yet little penetrated—our villages. Has anyone the slightest serious doubt as to the failure of their church-going to curb their vicious tendencies? I am writing this chapter in a large fishing and agricultural village, where three clergymen exercise a rare power over the people; yet I find its moral condition to be extraordinary. Take Spain, where the Church retains an almost medieval influence. It is a country of notorious cruelty and immorality.

Further—because an ounce of fact is worth a ton of logic—let us take a land where the moral culture has been separated from religion for centuries—Japan. Neither the native religion of Japan, Shinto, nor the imported and

widely-popular form of Buddhism, has attempted to influence the character of the people to any great extent. Their priests have confined their attention to ceremony and worship, and left conduct to the Confucian teachers and moralists. Now, these are strict Agnostics. For centuries every educated man in Japan has been Agnostic, and, as every writer on the subject says—whether we take missionaries such as Dr. Griffis and Munzinger, or writers like Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Diosy, or Japanese authorities like Professor Nitobe or the Marquis Ito—the morality of Japan has been entirely trusted to them. What has been the result? Professor Hearn says that we must endorse the verdict of Kaempffer that “in the practice of virtue, in purity of life and outward devotion, they far surpass the Christians.” The American missionary, Dr. Griffis, says that their “beautiful lives and noble characters” helped to mould his own character. M. Lamaisse says that “in sobriety, in personal dignity, in mutual respect and reciprocal benevolence, the mass of the people live above the moral level of the majority of westerners.” Sir Edwin Arnold says:—

Where else in the world does there exist such a conspiracy to be agreeable: such a widespread compact to render the difficult affairs of life as smooth and graceful as circumstances permit: such fair decrees of fine behaviour fixed and accepted by all: such universal restraint of the coarser impulses of speech and act: such pretty picturesqueness of daily existence: such sincere delight in beautiful artistic things: such frank enjoyment of the enjoyable: such tenderness to little children: such reverence for parents and old persons: such widespread refinement of tastes and habits: such courtesy to strangers: such willingness to please and be pleased?

I do not wish to press this high estimate of the Japanese character,

though I have not found a single writer in English, French, or German, who has spent many years in the heart of Japan, that does not agree with it. The Japanese character has its shades ; but in sobriety, humanity, sympathy, generosity, cleanliness, refinement, kindness, gentleness, self-respect, and self-restraint the Japanese are at least equal to any people in the world. This has been done by a purely humanist culture. "Confucius alone has done all this," says the German missionary, Munzinger; and the first principle laid down by Confucius was : "To give oneself earnestly to the duties owing to men, and while respecting spiritual beings, if there are any such, to keep aloof from them—this may be called wisdom." It is a wisdom that has had a wonderful success in the Far East. Considering her long isolation from the general stream of history—from that inheriting of extinct civilisations and that constant comparing of national experiences which have made Europe what it is—Japan's moral progress is remarkable. Thirty years ago the Japanese Government sent a commission to Europe and America to study the moral influence of Christianity. They were fully prepared to adopt it as the national religion of Japan if its spiritual efficacy were proved. Now, this commission of seventy educated Japanese was ideally impartial. Most of its members were Agnostics, who had no more interest in one religion than another, yet believed that it might be advisable to have a religion for the people at large. But they returned to Japan after a minute inquiry, and reported that Christianity (to quote the words in which Professor Hearn records their verdict) "had proved itself less efficacious as an ethical influence in the

West than Buddhism had done in the East."

It only remains to add that this building of the character of the people has been effected through the elementary and secondary schools. So great a stress is laid on the formation of the character of the children that no preaching or further moral culture is necessary. No religion is taught in the schools. The duty of man to his brother-man is the one principle recognised. And the same moral culture is found in China. "Not to communicate knowledge or learning, but to mould character, to instil right principles of action and conduct, is evidently the object of the Chinese common school," says Mr. Holcombe, a high American authority. In the higher schools this training of character is continued ; and there is the same absence of any further preaching. The result of it is hardly less successful than in Japan, though China, too, has been so long deprived of the stimulus of free intercourse with other nations. The standard of personal character is high. Europeans who only know Chinamen out of their country or in the ports, and missionaries who have to furnish a pretext for "converting" them, give very wrong impressions of the Chinese. Aside from such authorities as Mr. Holcombe, who are in sympathy with their ethical system, even writers like Mrs. Little render a fine account of the average character. They are, she says, "always hardworking, good-humoured, kindly, thrifty, law-abiding, contented, and, in the performance of duties laid upon them, astonishingly conscientious"; and she adds that "the moral conscience of the people is so educated that an appeal to it never falls flat, as it often would in England."

Here, then, we have an object-lesson



in the moral training of children without the aid of religion that must far outweigh all the anxieties of Christian mothers and all the logic of Christian apologists. While we are timidly discussing the feasibility of training our boys and girls on a purely human basis, we find that it has been done successfully in China for 2,500 years and in Japan for several centuries. While we are wondering how the world will live without belief in God as its moral ruler, we find that the greatest moralist of all time bade China, 2,500 years ago, "keep aloof from spiritual beings, if there are any," and the huge empire has, so far as its ethical culture is concerned, obeyed him to this day. A man like the Marquis Ito, deeply versed in the history of China and Japan, perfectly familiar with the moral condition of both countries, and also well acquainted with our religious development in the West, bids his countrymen look with unconcern on the decay of their popular religions to-day, because their moral culture (Bushido) will suffice. "Religion," he said to Mr. Stead, "is a source of weakness." This great achievement of a purely Agnostic moral culture is an eloquent answer to all our doubts. The higher Confucian ideal—than which, says Mr. Holcombe, "no higher type may be produced by any code or system of ethical training"—the Chün Tz, or "gentleman," is a practical standard, and has been realised by millions, not by a few ascetic saints. The literature of both Japan and China is rich in models of moral heroism. And—where Christianity has most conspicuously failed—the average character is good. But, as I said, I do not wish to press the comparison. It is enough that we have a great example of humani-

tarian culture that is far older than the civilisation of Europe.

It seemed to me advisable to reply at once to the timidity of religious people, and to the sophistry of those who encourage them, with the various series of solid facts which I have presented. There is obviously no foundation for the concern felt about the moral result of our abandoning Christianity. The arguments by which it is sought to justify that concern must yield before the array of facts I have marshalled. It is not a question for reasoning at all. If there are any who are so restricted in outlook and experience that they cannot find in the lives of the innumerable Agnostics about them a proof of the efficacy of purely humanist morality, let them study China and Japan, and compare the result with Europe; and let them see how the standard of character has improved among us, while religion has decayed. It will then be a question, not *whether* we may train children without religious ideas, but *how* we are to train them.<sup>1</sup> To this more practical question I must now devote a few paragraphs.

In approaching such a subject one is immediately confronted with the difficulty that arises from the very different educational conditions in the various classes of society. I can only meet this by making a few general observations on training in the school and training in the

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Miss Corelli's *Mighty Atom* could never have been written if she had had the slightest acquaintance with moral education in the Far East. Nor would it have been written if she had had any large acquaintance with Agnostic gentlemen, or a more accurate knowledge of the statistics of suicide. On the former point it is interesting to compare the opinion of another religious novelist, Mr. Quiller Couch, who said, in an article in the *Daily News*, that there was no friend and counsellor so much sought in difficult and delicate trouble as the Agnostic.

home, and informing the reader where to obtain detailed guidance. After what has been said, the solution of the school question is obvious. We need to adopt the principle, with more improved and more modern methods of application, of the schools of China and Japan. The actual training in morals and manners given in our elementary schools is pitiful in the extreme, and it is just this that throws so much responsibility on the parents and clergymen. Points of conduct and points of dogma are hopelessly confused. Sections of the Old Testament are used, out of which it is impossible for any but the most skilled teacher to extract useful moral instruction. Children are taught as literal truths episodes from the Old and New Testament which few scholarly clergymen take to be more than legends. Teachers are forced to give this instruction when they do not believe a word of it, and they have had no training whatever in the formation of character. The squabbles of the various sects rage around the children's lives until they grow sceptical and disdainful out of very weariness. And when they leave school, and enter the warehouse or workshop, they hear at once a constant stream of denial and contempt for what they were taught to regard as the sole foundation of right conduct. How we can expect good results from such a pitiful scheme as this, and on what sober ground (apart from sectarian interests) we can insist on the retention of such a scheme, it is difficult to see.

Our schools must be wholly relieved from what has been called religious instruction. This has been almost useless in itself, has very often been given by sceptical teachers, and has most gravely blinded us to the real absence of moral training. The time has come to relegate

religious instruction to the church or chapel, as long as people wish it to be given at all. Then the nation must set itself the serious task of making the formation of the character of the children its first educational aim. "Self-respect is the first aim of our educational system," said a Japanese Minister of Education to Mr. Henry Norman. It will be well for England when its Board of Education can say the same. The training of teachers must include, in the first place, a knowledge of the art of forming character. The curriculum must contain daily lessons in morals and manners—in gentleness, honesty, truthfulness, cleanliness, decency, respect, honour, and justice. Masters and mistresses shall place their chief pride, not in the quantity of facts and figures they can pack into the children's memories, but in the number of bright, happy, and sweet-tempered children they can show. Education (or the drawing out) of the child's aptitudes, moral and intellectual, shall be the object rather than what an American writer has called "Encephalisation," or the scratching of facts on the brain-tissues. The vision of Ruskin must be realised :—

In some far-away and yet undreamt-of hour I can even imagine that England may cast all thoughts of possessive wealth back to the barbaric nations among whom they first arose ; and that, while the sands of the Indus and adamant of Golconda may yet stiffen the housings of the charger, and flash from the turban of the slave, she, as a Christian mother, may at last attain to the virtues and the treasures of a heathen one, and be able to lead forth her sons, saying—These are my jewels !

But let the reader not suppose that this is really, as Ruskin thinks, a dream of a remote and problematic future, a page from More's *Utopia*, or Morris's *News from Nowhere*, or Bellamy's

*Looking Backward.* The work is proceeding. In France a great number of influential men and women have banded themselves in a "League of Sincerity," to secure a perfectly honest and practical training for their children apart from all those disputed dogmas of the Churches. In the United States the Societies for Ethical Culture are showing the way. In Germany the *Ethische Gesellschaften* are attacking the problem. In England, I am glad to say, we are doing more than elsewhere. Besides the formation of many Ethical, Socialist, and Secularist Sunday-schools, which give moral lessons of this type with complete success, there is a Moral Instruction League that pursues the aim on a much larger scale. It has framed a complete syllabus of moral lessons, and is gradually, with the help of trained educationists and experts, clothing this skeleton scheme with a full body of instructions to teachers and model lessons. At Leicester and several other places a scheme of moral lessons has already been adopted by the Education Committees. Several books of specimen lessons have been published, notably Mr. Quilter's *Onward and Upward* (published at 2s. 6d. by Swan Sonnenschein and Co.) and Mr. Gould's *Children's Book of Moral Lessons* (three series<sup>1</sup>) and *Stories from the Bible* (published by Watts & Co.). I would also recommend the reading of Mr. Hayward's *Secret of Herbart*. Thus a very considerable part of the work has already been done, and it has won the warm approval of educationists, and even of some influential clergymen, such as Dr. John Hunter.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first series may now be had for sixpence (paper edition).

<sup>2</sup> For further details about the work and aims of the Moral Instruction League the reader may apply to the Secretary, Mr. Harrold Johnson,

From the elementary school this scheme of direct lessons in morals and manners—not abstract morality, remembrance, but close and detailed allusion to life, with constant appeal to history and the lives of good men and women—would pass on to secondary schools and colleges. Every mother who sends, or may send, sons to these institutions knows how great is the need for more effective moral training. From Eton and Harrow down to the smallest endowed school they are infected by a vice which is the despair of teachers, and which often follows the boys, to their ruin, into mature life. As a teacher, and one who has compared notes with other masters, I know well the terrible prevalence of this, and I need not go on to other defects. Religious ideas fail, in most cases, to influence the character of boys (though this vice is by no means confined to boys' schools). The most effective appeal has always been an appeal to their honour and manliness, and a rational and straightforward discussion of it. Read the beautiful pictures which Professor Hearn gives of Japanese colleges (in which he has taught for years) in his works, and the contrast will be helpful. We need to make a science and an art of this appeal to the dignity and honour of the boy or girl; to show

19, Buckingham Street, Charing Cross, London, W.C., who will gladly give information. I do not discuss the question of the use of the Bible for two reasons. The first is that the teacher under the new order will be instructed to use it freely, like other good books, where it is fitted for his purpose. The second is that the great bulk of the Bible is admittedly of interest only to scholars; many parts of it are certainly not suitable to be made accessible to children, and even the very best parts of it—the parts, such as the prophecies and some of the Psalms, which are among the best moral literature of the world—can only be fully understood by men and women who know life. It would be a tragedy if a child understood them.

them, as they have never been shown before, the roots of vice or virtue in their actual lives, the shadows cast by vicious habits and imperfect self-control, the brighter and happier world they create about them by kindness, generosity, honour, and decency.

When every school in England has seriously set about this work, we shall find the burden of the parent grow lighter and the need for supernatural motives disappear. Then we shall have no longer that terrible difficulty of the girl or youth between fifteen (or so) and marriage. It has been largely created by relying chiefly on supernatural motives for conduct in the younger days, and these have been questioned and weakened when the age of reasoning and observation arrived. In many a thousand cases the "wicked" child has only been honest and truthful.<sup>1</sup> In many millions more it has really lacked any foundation for right conduct. This new training would instil in the mind of the boy or girl principles of right action which would only be confirmed when they became thoughtful and observant, and saw the effects in life of viciousness. The parents would deal with their children as the teacher does in the school. Such books as those of Mr. Gould and Mr. Quilter will give hints to parents who need them; but I

believe most mothers will realise how effective all along has been the simple human appeal to the child. In thousands of homes in England since the middle of the nineteenth century the word "God" has never been mentioned, and the training has been completely successful. It is said of the children of Colonel Ingersoll that they had never once been struck, yet the result was exquisite. Another Agnostic parent, who had reared his children with conspicuous success, showed me the chief principle of their training hanging on their bedroom walls: "To thine own self be true." I have never known a mother go back from humanist to theological ideas for greater effect, or envy the woman who could honestly talk of God and prayer.

I cannot go into further detail, but would urge inquiring mothers to follow the references I have given. There is no need whatever to fear that the training of children will suffer by the disappearance of religion. Rather have we good ground for hope that, if we would briskly sweep away all this dallying with decaying creeds and all the insincerity it involves, we shall set ourselves the more seriously to the task of the formation of character as a work interesting and of unspeakable importance in itself. Then at last we may discover the means to influence, not an elect few, but also, and more especially, the great majority which Christianity has been content to look on as not elect.

<sup>1</sup> For a very interesting and useful example of this see Lady Florence Dixie's autobiography, *I Jain*, and her *Songs of a Child*.

## CHAPTER IX.

## WHERE DO WE STAND IN RELIGION?

I OPENED this essay with a glance at the decay of the Churches from the point of view of their numerical following. This has become so apparent to all of late that the clergy, whose obvious policy it is to deny it as long as possible, are making grave comments on it in every country. But there is another way of considering the decay of religion, and to this I would particularly draw the attention of women. I have now pointed out that they have no special ground for gratitude to Christianity, that they possess no peculiar "religious instinct" which can assure them of its truth without their troubling to examine its evidences, and that there is not the slightest reason to think Christianity indispensable for moral and spiritual culture. They have, therefore, as a duty to themselves, their children, and the world at large, to consider in the ordinary way if the beliefs they do so much to retain among us are true or not. As a further incentive to do this, I propose to put before them a few facts relating to the stupendous changes which are taking place in the minds of modern thinkers, and even theologians, with regard to the doctrines of conventional religion.

People with little leisure naturally form their estimate of religious teaching from the deliveries of the pulpit. It is not surprising that such people are unacquainted with the profound changes which are taking place within the shrunken area of the religious bodies. Christian scholarship is utterly transform-

ing the body of dogma which the Christian pulpit and Press are urging upon the people as if it were still agreed upon. It is safe to assume that the women of England would hesitate to give that unwavering credence they do to the Churches if they were aware of the surprising extent to which the familiar religious ideas have already been surrendered. I will illustrate the point by a number of quotations from contemporary literature especially bearing upon the three central Christian ideas of the Bible, the future life, and a personal God.

A recent incident in English clerical life will serve to introduce the question of modern theological views of the Bible. Some time ago the Rev. Mr. Beeby was virtually driven out of the service of the Church of England by his bishop, Dr. Gore, for questioning the Virgin-birth of Christ. Most people in the Church probably thought that the bishop had discharged an obvious, if painful, duty in expelling a clergyman who called into question one of the most characteristic features of the Biblical narrative. But the truth is that Christian scholarship—I need make no reference whatever to non-Christian research—has cast so grave a doubt on the familiar story of the birth of Christ that it is scarcely honest to preach it any longer. I remember meeting Dr. Mivart, then a professed Catholic, some five years ago. He literally laughed at the idea of the Virgin-birth; and gradually I have learned that this is almost the typical attitude of scholarly

Christians. The Dean of Westminster has recently written that "in the minds of thoughtful men there is a very serious disquietude in regard to the doctrine of the Virgin-birth.....a real unsettlement of minds in regard to a matter which hardly occurred to their fathers as a subject of inquiry." I take the quotation from an article by the Rev. Dr. Rashdall in the *Independent Review* for May, 1903. Dr. Rashdall himself goes on to say that it "constitutes the chief difficulty with able and educated men who might otherwise be inclined to seek orders in the Church of England." He lets us see his own estimate of the evidence for the legend when he asks: "What credence should we give to some story about the birth or infancy of Napoleon Bonaparte which could not be traced back further than to a Bonapartist memoir writer who wrote about the year 1872, and did not mention his authority?" The clerical writers of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, edited by Canon Cheyne—almost the one English clergyman who would tell the people the plain truth in these matters—disdainfully set the legend aside as worthless. The writers of Cone's *Handbooks to the New Testament* in America have little more respect for it. Professor Usener says that "for the whole birth and childhood story of Matthew, in its every detail, it is possible to find a pagan substratum." Professor Loofs, one of the first Biblical scholars of the German Church, says that "anyone who understands anything about historical criticism must concede that the Virgin-birth belongs to the least credible of New Testament traditions"; and that "no well-informed, and at the same time honest and conscientious, theologian" can teach it with the old confidence any longer. In a word, the

story of the miraculous conception and birth of Christ, in all its details, is now regarded by all the Biblical scholars in the German Church, by most of the leading Biblical scholars in the English and American Churches, and even by some of the chief Catholic scholars of the French Church (such as M. Loisy), as a late and worthless interpolation in the New Testament. Yet year by year, as Christmas returns, we find the ordinary clergy expatiating on the legend as if no change whatever had taken place!

Perhaps the next most characteristic feature of the Biblical narrative is (if we except the Crucifixion) the account of the Resurrection. This story is faring no better than that of the Nativity in the hands of modern Christian scholars. If the reader cares to look up the article on this subject in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, or in Dr. Cary's *Synoptic Gospels*—both honest and commendable efforts to tell the truth about the Bible to ordinary Christian readers—he will find that the dogma of the Resurrection is practically given up by Christian scholars. Dr. Loofs puts it and the Ascension on just the same footing as the Nativity: they belong to "the latest and least reliable traditions of the Gospel narrative"—in other words, are worthless interpolations. Dr. Schmiedel finds the Gospel accounts full of "glaring contradictions," which "show only too clearly with what lack of concern for historical precision the evangelist wrote." Dr. Cary finds "an utter absence of truly historical conditions," and says of the various features of the story that they tell "incredible things" and "must be looked on with suspicion."

Let me repeat that I am now quoting only representative Christian scholars—divines who give the current thought in

the higher circles of the German Church and the growing thought of English Christian scholarship. It is clear from this that the teaching about Christ and the Bible, still rhetorically delivered from our pulpits, is little short of dishonest; yet this is all that religious women are able to acquaint themselves with, as a rule. The traditional figure of Christ is dissolving rapidly. Its most familiar and striking features are gone beyond recall. The Gospel story of his life is a late-written biography, full of contradictions and interpolations, or "layers of tradition," as these Christian authorities put it. The untrustworthiness of the Gospels has now been admitted in principle, and it is impossible to foresee where it will end, or how much of the figure of Christ will be left. If I were to step outside the range of strictly Christian writings, I should find that there is a growing tendency to regard Christ as a pure myth.<sup>1</sup> But it is enough for my purpose to rely on Christian works. In these the dissolution of the venerated historical figure is proceeding rapidly. The authority of the New Testament as a record of his life is daily diminishing. The critical principle, which has long ago destroyed the idea of there being any supernatural value in the Old Testament, is now applied freely to the New Testament. Even less scholarly popular writers are beginning at length to apprise people of the change. An article by Canon Henson in the *Contemporary Review*, on "The Future of the Bible," insists that it is useless to dream of putting any check on this process of critical dissolution. The New Testament, like the Old, is a

legitimate subject for this inquiry, and the result is quite fatal to conventional pulpit oratory. Archdeacon Wilson, in his latest popular writings on the Bible, implores his colleagues to abandon their futile hostility to the new views. "The Bible, these writers say, remains "inspired"—is still "the word of God." But that can only mean now that it is a source of moral and spiritual helpfulness—which Rationalists do not deny—not that it possesses any historical weight, until this has been won for it here and there by the ordinary methods of criticism.

I have confined myself to the New Testament partly because this is the sole source of our knowledge of Christ, and partly because it is now almost superfluous to discuss the inspiration of the Old Testament. One of the first Biblical scholars of the Catholic Church, Father David, once said to me: "The Old Testament was not written for us, but for the Jews, and the sooner the Church can quietly drop it overboard the better." One is not yet free to say these things quite openly in the Catholic Church, but they are said daily in the various branches of the Protestant Church. No educated clergyman now questions that the earlier books of the Old Testament, as we have them, were written in the fifth century before Christ; that the really earliest books in it, Amos and Hosea, were written about the ninth century; that the earliest documents we can trace as having been used in writing the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch) date from about the ninth century; that the stories of Genesis and Exodus have no historical value; that none of the Psalms can be proved to have been written by David, and most of them come down to the fifth and fourth centuries; that Kings and

<sup>1</sup> This is very ably argued, and with a great weight of scholarship, by Mr. J. M. Robertson, in his *Christianity and Mythology and Pagan Christs*.



Chronicles have a very precarious and limited historical value, and Daniel, Ruth, Jonah, Job, and Tobit none at all. However, more serious consequences follow from the analysis of the New Testament, and so it was taken up with more reluctance and has been more fiercely resisted. I have shown that the work has now proceeded far enough to revolutionise Christian teaching. Doubt is thrown on all the miracles, and we are urged to "concentrate on the sayings of Jesus," and to remember that it is his life rather than his death that matters. I say this is nothing short of a revolution; and I believe it will be little short of a revelation to the great majority of the supporters of the Churches. It means a retreat to a conception of Christ and of the Bible which may be held by any Rationalist; while it will be news to most readers of the Christian Press that such a man as Professor Haeckel, on whom such bitterness has been poured, only differs by slight shades in his estimate of the Bible and of Christ from the leading scholars of the German Church.\*

And while the clergy are thus themselves dissolving the conventional figure of Christ and the authority of the Bible, philosophers are submitting the belief in

God to a scarcely less drastic treatment. Here again I prefer to give an idea of contemporary thought rather than argue myself, and, as far as possible, to quote writers who are by no means Agnostic or Atheistic. I have earlier referred to the effort of Mr. W. H. Mallock to find a new base for religious belief, so that he will be understood to be a sympathetic writer; he is, in fact, one of the most persistent critics of Rationalism. Yet he says, in his *Religion as a Credible Doctrine*, of the conventional belief:—

We must divest ourselves of all foregone conclusions, of all question-begging reverences, and look the facts of the universe steadily in the face. If theists will but do this, what they will see will astonish them. They will see that if there is anything at the back of this vast process with a consciousness and a purpose in any way resembling our own—a Being who knows what he wants, and is doing his best to get it—he is, instead of a holy and all-wise God, a scatter-brained, semi-powerful, semi-impotent monster.

This is hard language, but it is in substance consonant with what many definitely religious philosophers are saying to-day. The late Mr. Fiske, for instance, said in the same connection: "The fact stands inexorably before us that a Supreme Will, enlightened by perfect intelligence and possessed of infinite power, might differently have fashioned the universe, though in ways inconceivable by us, so that the suffering and the waste of life which characterise Nature's process of evolution might have been avoided." Mr. Fiske is compelled to retreat upon the belief that God is not an all-powerful Being distinct from Nature and man; and this is, as a fact, the position in which religious thinkers are meeting to-day. Professor Le Conte, another of the chief religious thinkers of America, gives the same pantheistic and impersonal idea of God: "The forces

\* Readers who wish to verify or follow up what I have said in this section will do well to read the *Encyclopædia Biblica* (under almost any article), remembering that this is a work written by Christian scholars for ordinary Christian readers. In America Dr. Cone's *Handbooks* will be more accessible. The article of Canon Henson in the *Contemporary* for February, 1904, and the recent sixpenny and threepenny books of Archdeacon Wilson and the Rev. Walter Welch, show in a popular form the resistless pressure of the critics. The works of Cheyne, Sayce, Bennett, Driver, etc., are all useful, and all orthodox. The Rationalist Press Association publishes (at one penny) an excellent summary of the conclusions of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, and (at a shilling) Mr. Leonard's *New Story of the Bible*.

of Nature are naught else than different forms of one omnipresent Divine energy or will." Professor Royce, a recent Gifford lecturer, writes: "We need not conceive the eternal Ethical Individual [man] as in any sense less in the grade of complication of his activity or in the multitude of his acts of will than is the Absolute." Professor Upton, a Hibbert lecturer, has the same pantheistic idea. Professor William James, another recent Gifford lecturer, tells us "we must bid a definite good-bye to dogmatic theology," and openly rejects monotheism altogether at the end of his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

These are among the most important recent pronouncements of religious thinkers on the conception of God. They completely destroy the idea of God current in the Churches, and substitute one which makes prayer and worship altogether irrational. If we and Nature and God are one, the idea on which the Churches build is wholly erroneous, and their system of worship must crumble away. They can only maintain that God is a Person by giving an entirely new meaning to the word. And these men, it must be remembered, are the highest authorities in this matter, as such men as Canon Cheyne and Professor Schmiedel are on the Bible. It only remains for me to show how their conception is spreading among all classes of educated people—not to speak of professed Agnostics. The Rev. Mr. Ballard has lately said that he looks to science to restore this belief in God that philosophy seems to have undermined. But there was never so desperate a hope as this. The general silence of scientific men on religious questions is ominous—oppressive. All the energy and devotion of the clergy

seems unable to induce them to use a particle of their great authority over the mind of our generation in favour of religion. But, even when they do present their views, it is usually to betray how widely they are removed from current theology. Take four of the chief expressions of opinion in recent years. Sir Henry Thompson not long ago published an essay on *The Unknown God*, in which he said that "the religion of nature must eventually become the faith of the future," and that in it "a priestly hierarchy has no place, nor are there any specified formularies of worship." Lord Kelvin recently made a brief speech which was loudly acclaimed as favouring religion. But not only was his reference to a "creative Power" no nearer to the Church teaching than is that of Mr. Herbert Spencer, but he spoke in the name of a science (biology) which is not his own, and he was immediately contradicted by all our most distinguished biologists. Dr. Russel Wallace, the spiritist, has recently written again in defence of religion, but he, too, based his argument on a science which is not his own, and he was immediately silenced by the proper authorities on the matter. Later still Professor Lloyd-Morgan wrote in the *Contemporary Review*. He told his Christian readers that they must for ever give up the idea of religion obtaining the support of science, and grounded his vague theism (somewhat similar to that of the philosophers I have quoted) on a precarious metaphysical argument. To these well-known pronouncements I can only add a profession of materialism (in *Nature*, June 5th, 1902) by Sir W. T. Thiselton-Dyer, and a confession of heterodoxy by Dr. Jonathan Hutchinson (which I heard in a lecture by him at Haslemere). These are the only phrases

that have broken the silence of the scientific world of late years in England on religious questions—and they are significant.<sup>1</sup>

When we pass out to the larger world of generally educated people, we find indications innumerable that the current idea of God is failing. Mr. H. G. Wells, who has so closely observed contemporary life for the purpose of forecasting the future, says in his *Anticipations* that “the prevailing men of the future will presume to no knowledge whatever, will presume to no possibility of knowledge, of the real being of God,” and that they “will content themselves with denying the self-contradictory absurdities of an obstinately anthropomorphic theology,” such as “that God is an omniscient mind.” Thus one of the best-informed observers of our time believes that within the present century Agnosticism will be, as in Japan, the religion of all educated people. And when one glances into our literature one finds justification enough for the forecast. Not only philosophers and scientists, but even poets, reject the older conception of a personal God. The *Unknown God* and the *Hope of the World* of Mr. W. Watson are well known. He thrusts aside—

“A god whose ghost in arch and aisle  
Yet haunts his temple—and his tomb,  
But follows in a little while  
Odin and Zeus to equal doom;  
A god of kindred seed and line,  
Man’s giant shadow, hailed divine.”

And Watson’s poem is founded on the

<sup>1</sup> Since this work was written Sir Oliver Lodge has spoken, apparently, in defence of religion. Here again, however, we only find an attenuated theism and a belief in a future life on spiritist grounds. Not only does Sir O. Lodge reject all the characteristic Christian dogmas (such as the miraculous birth of Christ), but his conception of God and of the future life would have to be pronounced rank heresy by the official theologian.

chief idea of Tennyson’s pantheistic *In Memoriam*. Meredith and Hardy and Swinburne are, as I said, equally Rationalistic. In fact, we find theology itself invaded by the new feeling. Sir Henry Thompson gives in his essay a curious observation of Dr. Jowett to Dr. Caird, two divines whose conception of God was very different from that of the liturgy. A Congregationalist minister of the North of England openly preaches Monism from his pulpit. On all sides, in every branch of literature, we find signs of the surrender of the old idea of a Personal God set over against man and Nature; and without such a conception the system of Church worship cannot honestly endure.

An even greater change is visible when we come to examine current thought about a future life. Here the religious philosophers I have just quoted make a very feeble pretence of defending the old idea. Professor Royce “gives up the question of immortality as insoluble by philosophy,” says Professor Le Conte; and Le Conte immediately adds that “perhaps it is.” Professor W. James sees no evidence for it. Professor Münsterburg says: “Only to a cheap curiosity can it appear desirable that the inner life, viewed as a series of psychological facts, shall go on and on”; and “Science opposes to any doctrine of individual immortality an unbroken and impregnable barrier.” Mr. Fiske finds man to be immortal only in the sense that he is a part of the whole, which is eternal. When some of the chief religious thinkers of our time are thus reduced almost to silence, we can find little beyond fantastic and desperate speculations in the ordinary apologist. Thoughtful men are avoiding the subject to-day. Among those who are, by their

profession, the best acquainted with the mind of man—our chief psychologists—there is not one who argues for personal immortality. Some turn in despair to spiritist phenomena, but, generally speaking, the old confidential vision of the future has almost gone. The scientific evidence against the popular conception of life in heaven or hell forms, as Münsterberg says, "an impenetrable barrier." Only trust, or groundless faith, can overleap it.

It is clear, then, that a profound change is taking place even among thoughtful men who are still counted religious. The clerical habit of giving people to understand that the structure of belief is essentially unchanged, and that only a few among the philosophers and scientists and literary men of our time sanction the popular revolt against it, is disingenuous. Outside the ranks of the professional defenders of the Christian belief, the clergy, hardly a single thinker now supports the old beliefs in the form in which they are still presented in the official teaching of the Churches and by ordinary preachers. The Bishop of London could not, if he cared to try, induce three first-class thinkers—philosophers, scientists, or historians—in England, the United States, France, and Germany, to subscribe to-day to the Apostles' Creed in the sense in which it is still given in the Churches. The whole structure of belief is crumbling. When the ablest religious philosophers tell us that a Personal God of the older type is impossible, and when the leading Biblical scholars in the Churches add that the accounts of the Creation and Fall are legends borrowed from paganism, and that the New Testament was written by men with a "lack of concern for historical precision," the very foundations

of the faith are weakened, if not destroyed. These men may themselves think out a number of symbolic senses under cover of which they may still repeat the old formulæ. The world at large is not sophisticated enough to do so. It is only because they do not know that the structure of religion is so shaken and riddled—because they are falsely told that it is only Rationalists who doubt the personality of God, and the personal immortality of man, and the miracles of Christ, and the miraculous birth and resurrection, and the reality of heaven and hell, and the Fall and the Atonement—that women cling to the Churches. It is time they knew that all these things are taught *within* the Churches to-day.

Nor may women suppose that at least the clergy themselves retain an implicit faith in the old beliefs. Perhaps one of the saddest features of this age of transition in religious ideas is the scepticism which the clergy have to conceal behind a bold profession of faith. Far be it from me to join in the suggestion that the clergy are generally dishonest. I have moved among them as a colleague, and know that there are thousands, not only of simple-minded, but of intelligent, clergymen, in every denomination, who retain a literal belief in the old creeds. But I know just as well that there are numbers who have no such belief, and are at times radical sceptics. I know of ministers of several denominations who disbelieve the doctrines they serve. I know Catholic priests and Anglican clergymen who have made an honest attempt to earn their living as ordinary laymen, and who, when the attempt failed, have returned with their scepticism to the ministry. The impotence of a clergyman when he abandons his own

profession is so pathetic that, for every one who leaves and suffers, scores remain behind. They are in many cases writhing under the burden of creeds in which they do not believe. Not long ago a Mr. Ryder seceded from the Church of England. In a little work (entitled *Chart and Voyage*) which he then wrote and addressed to his late colleagues he fully bears out my own experience. In fact, the well-known traditions of the Broad Church in England (offering a score of reasons why one may honestly profess to believe what one does not believe), and the occasional outbreak and submission (as with the Dean of Ripon) of some clergyman or prelate, tell their own tale. Happily, greater freedom is now being won by the clergy; and women who care to follow the proceedings of such bodies as the Churchmen's Union will discover how far contemporary liberalism has invaded the Churches. On one point, the analysis of the Bible, almost all the destructive critics are clergymen, so that here, at least, there can be no question of antipathy to Christianity.

I see no sound moral reason why these things should be hidden from women. Mrs. C. Perkins Stetson, in her *Women and Economics*, makes a fine protest against the masculine notion of tying one half of the race to the starting-post while the other half runs. We are discarding that error to-day, and learning to welcome into the doing of the world's work those women who desire to take their part in it. One of the first qualities for this—not that it is already too common among men—must be an alertness to new ideas, a promptness to discover and to tread new avenues of progress. Advance is made by cautious and well-considered change. The conservative instinct is

good; but to be entirely useful it must be found combined with a sober progressiveness. The world is only now at the beginning of the consciousness of its mighty powers and of the great ideal of universal happiness which is breaking in a hundred partial lights on the mind of our generation. "We must seek in the past a pledge of the future, not the future itself," as Mazzini said. "Let us be great in our turn." It is neither wholesome nor just that we should seek to keep woman in comparative ignorance, even if she prefers to restrict her share in the world's work to the domestic sphere.

These principles seem to me to have as great, if not a greater, application to religious questions than to others. The Church has, in spite of all the terrible blunders I have referred to, played a great part in the history of Europe. Some day, when the din and heat of the present religious controversy have ceased, we shall appraise and appreciate its influence for good. At the present day it is almost a disservice to the cause of truth and progress to bestir oneself in this direction. No sooner does a sympathetic Agnostic or Positivist writer evince a recognition of some benefit done by the Church, but his words are at once torn from their text, and forced into an admission of the case for the Church as it is perversely and untruly stated by the ecclesiastical historian. On the one hand, in fact, the Neo-Catholic is ready to spring upon every syllable of sympathy, and urge the retention of his beliefs in a "symbolic" sense; on the other, the "Pragmatist," that strange outcome of the confusion of modern philosophy, hovers by in order to prove that this recognition of service must outweigh all our criticisms of the falsity of doctrines. In such circumstances we can hardly be

expected to dwell impartially on whatever good Christianity has done.

It is enough, for the moment, to say we recognise that it has had in some directions a good influence. But that influence becomes questionable the moment it rests on beliefs that are felt to be untrue, or that have to be shielded from criticism. To prolong the period of transition, to linger in a stage which is so conducive to insincerity, seems to me to be little short of a moral catastrophe. Let us have a "League of Sincerity," to use the pretty name adopted by a French association which has been

founded on these principles. "Truth will prevail" is a splendid act of faith in the ultimate soundness of human nature. But "Truth *shall* prevail" is a living and ennobling principle for women and men. To meet the moral dangers which the new world-problems and the new commerce and industry and the new freedom of discussion are bringing upon us, we need, above all, a strong sense of honour and sincerity. If we play fast and loose with that vital principle in the very province of spiritual culture, it is folly to expect it to triumph in other fields of life.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE HUMANISM OF TO-MORROW

THE reader will often have experienced the sensation of rising occasionally from the narrow, crowded streets of some great city to the summit of a hill or monument from which the whole may be surveyed. How the eye looks triumphantly over the huge blocks that had restricted it! How the infinite and intricate details fall into a plan that can be grasped in one sweep of vision! How many features reveal themselves that were invisible from below! One experiences some such sensation in moments of calm and comprehensive meditation on the world-movements of our time. While we live in our daily little grooves, in our little hives of domestic or civic activity, our experience gains in richness of detail, but loses, and often suggests wholly erroneous ideas, from its narrowness. The mere accident of our living near

some active church or chapel, with an attractive preacher, colours our whole thought, and makes us feel that all the talk of a decay of religion must be unfounded. The views of our own little social circle are vaguely felt to reflect the temper of the world at large. We all know so well the fallacy of generalising on a narrow experience. And as we extend our vision, as we look out on the literature of the world, as we rise from our groove and take a broad view of the situation, the narrow limits melt away, and we see things in something like true proportion.

There is no intellectual interest of our time in which this is more true than in the matter of religion. For instance, let us imagine a Roman Catholic of this country, who fancies his "bark of Peter" is sailing serenely on the waves of

modern thought, transferred to a scene that was witnessed in Rome in the autumn of 1904. Thousands of Free-thinkers of France, Spain, and Italy, with a group of the first scholars in Europe at their head, had gathered there for their annual Congress. France had sent more than a thousand delegates, bearing with them the official adhesion of the Municipal Council of Paris. Spain had sent hundreds of enthusiastic delegates. Of Italians there were many thousand representatives, with the official adhesion of whole municipalities from various parts of Italy. The Pope had protested solemnly against the holding of such a Congress under the shadow of the Vatican. In reply, the Italian Government announced that it would extend to the Freethinking pilgrims all the privileges it had ever granted to Roman Catholic pilgrimages. What a mighty change since the day when a pope could keep an emperor on his knees for hours in the courtyard at Canossa!

This Congress was a visible and tangible proof of the disintegration of Catholicism that is proceeding with extraordinary speed on the Continent. The vastest and most wealthy and most powerful Church in the world, with its magnificently-organised celibate ministry, its roots deep in the soil of Europe, its splendid monuments of mediæval art, its alluring ritual, its wide economic and political influence, is tottering to its fall. In France it cannot now count more than one-fifth of the people as even nominal supporters. In Italy it is rapidly falling into the same position. In Spain more than a thousand centres of Freethought are undermining it. Only the conviction that an enormous and powerful section of their populations

were in sympathy with this anti-theological Congress could have moved the French and Italian Governments to extend to it the open and generous patronage they did. Within a year or two the Church will be disestablished in France. Within a few years more it will be equally excluded from the public life of Italy, and, within a few decades, of Spain. Then it will have to press heavily on the allegiance of its nominal supporters, and we shall see it shrink into a mere shadow of the great frame that once dominated the life of Europe. Not only in England, America, and Germany, where Protestantism had prepared the way for free discussion, is religion melting away before the sun of modern knowledge; it is vanishing more rapidly still in the now thoroughly awakened Latin nations. The abandonment of the old beliefs is a world-movement.

I have already given (pp. 13, 14) one of the chief indications that this movement is undermining religion in England no less than on the Continent. When we compare the results of the census of church-going taken by the *British Weekly* in 1886 with the results of the census taken in 1903 by the *Daily News*, we find that the Churches have lost nearly half a million worshippers in less than twenty years in London alone. One of the Anglican leaders who was asked to comment on the result of the census said that it really only meant that, now the social pressure was removed, only those who had sincere religious convictions went to church. But there was no more social pressure in 1886 than there is to-day; Canon Scott-Holland was thinking of a century ago. Moreover, while the Churches have largely ceased to be in a position to exert social or economic



pressure, they have, on the other hand, provided themselves with a new weapon—social attractiveness. Large numbers of Anglican Churches now have a ritual that draws numbers of even the indifferent. Nonconformist Churches have gone out among the people in a most spirited endeavour to win their support. "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons" and all kinds of concessions have been made to the spirit of the age. The clergy have taken an active share in social and philanthropic work beyond all the dreams of their predecessors. The last twenty years represent an untiring, feverish effort on their part to extend their influence. Yet we have this irrefragable statistical proof that they have (when the Jews are omitted from the *Daily News* census) lost nearly half a million worshippers in the metropolis alone in that period.<sup>1</sup> All their vast resources and all the devotion of their clergy have disastrously failed to stem the tide.

An observant glance will discover almost daily other solid indications that the movement is a very real and very serious one. In the summer of 1904 the *Daily News* (the chief organ of the Nonconformists) published a leading article on the prospect of this country abandoning Christianity. The *Daily Telegraph* published a significant correspondence on the subject, "Do We Believe?" Dr. Jessopp declared at a

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to make this calculation clear, as the results of the census have been put by religious people in a most misleading form. In 1886, out of a population of 3,816,483, some 1,167,312 attended places of Christian worship. The population of this area has increased to four millions and a half, yet (excluding Jews, who are wrongly included in the census) only 950,000 now attend church or chapel or hall. With the increase of the population, the figure should be about 1,400,000, if the Churches had merely held their ground against indifference and active revolt.

medical dinner: "Yours is a rising, mine a decaying, profession." The Rev. F. Ballard, one of the active protagonists of Christianity, asserted in *Great Thoughts*: "The outlook is a serious one.....The modern atmosphere is, in general, tending away from rather than towards all that is distinctive of Christianity." Another protagonist (the Rev. R. Williams) wrote that "already it is the fact that the cultured laity, on the one hand, and the great bulk of the democracy, on the other, are outside the Churches." The Bishop of London has declared that in his old diocese only one working man in fifteen goes to church. A weekly journal (the *Clarion*) opened a drastic attack on religion, and the sole effect was an increase of its circulation by thirty per cent. The Rationalist Press Association has sold, without effort, nearly a million copies of anti-theological works in a little over two years; while the various theological publishing concerns established to meet its work have, with all their huge resources and means of circulation, been unable to draw anywhere near the Rationalist circulations.

I may take a further striking illustration of the real decay of religion that is concealed behind the fictitious optimism of the Churches from the position of the Church of Rome in this country. In this case, not only the actual members of the Church, but thousands of people outside it, believe that there is continuous growth. Yet never was there so empty and unfounded a claim. The number of Catholics in this country sixty years ago is given by a Jesuit writer (*Month*, July, 1885) as about 800,000. The population of England and Wales has nearly doubled since that time, so that, without any further accession, the Catholic population ought now to be more than

a million and a half. But since 1841 nearly a million Irish Catholics have immigrated to this country, and, as most of these came between 1851 and 1861, their descendants should add another million and a half, at the least, to the Catholic population. Thus, without counting a single convert, from the Oxford Movement onwards, there should be three million Catholics in this country. There are actually less than a million and a quarter. The proportion of Catholic marriages, of clergy, and of school children agree in giving this result, as I showed in the *National Review* (August, 1901). The Catholic Church is crumbling away in this country as surely, though less rapidly, than in France and Italy. It is the dispersion of the Irish nation that has misled people in England and America as to the position of Catholicism. There ought to be, on a normal growth of the population, nearly 17,000,000 people in Ireland to-day, mostly Roman Catholics. There are actually less than four millions and a half. The missing twelve millions are in England, Australia, and the United States. Yet with this vast accession of Irish men and women, and all the converts that have seceded from the Church of England, the Catholic population dwindles away. And this huge leakage increases in our time, and, in the main, represents an addition to the great multitude that now acknowledge no ecclesiastical allegiance.

I have endeavoured in this essay to engage the attention of women in this vast transformation of the religious institutions of our time. They contribute far more than men do to the maintenance of those institutions; yet they are far less ready than men to show a reasoned belief in religious doctrines.

I have assumed that this was largely due to three fallacies which the clergy disseminate among them, and I have invited them to a patient analysis of those fallacies. It seems clear that they have no sounder reason than men to refrain from examining the grounds of their convictions. There—except that I have added a few observations that should tend to shake the fictitious firmness of their attitude—I must leave them. If they will write to the Secretary of the Rationalist Press Association for a list of the sixpenny works published by that body—of which more than 800,000 have been sold during the last two years—they will find an abundant and excellent literature with which to continue their study of religion. It only remains for me to meet the last and inevitable preliminary inquiry: What will come next, when religion is destroyed?

I have said that I agree fully with Emerson in rejecting "the doctrine of consequences." The human mind is not so poor that we should suppose it is less capable to-day of devising moral structures than it was two thousand, or ten thousand, years ago. Falsehood is not so beneficent an element in life that we should ever deem it indispensable. It would be, as Emerson says, mere cowardice to shrink from sacrificing a familiar and, perhaps, treasured untruth because of the dislocation that would follow. This could not be other than temporary.

Yet a rational concern about the future is inevitable in the case of serious-minded men and women. None but a cynic or a fool could contemplate with complete indifference the destruction of beliefs or principles on which civilised life has even partly rested for many centuries. It is one more of those

perverse calumnies of the Rationalist, of which we have seen so many, that he is a man with a morbid love of destruction, or a "hatred of Christianity," as the clerical Press generally puts it. He is moved by two impulses; and both of them are noble and full of promise for the world. The first is a passion for truth, a restless impatience of untruth. That is one of the most imperative needs in the life of our age; and, if the Rationalist were eventually proved to be wrong in all his criticisms, he would, nevertheless, have contributed to the moral spirit of the world. The clergy, for reasons which are now clear, have ceased to lay that stress on truth and truthfulness which the unchanging circumstances of life demand of the moral teacher. The Rationalist has taken up that part of his gospel. What I have been able to quote about the part which Rationalists have played in rousing the conscience of the modern world on the woman question will sufficiently illustrate the general beneficence of this element of their motive.

The second impulse is one that may be traced without difficulty in the earliest protests of Rationalism against dogma—in the martyr-creeds of Giordano Bruno or Arnaldo di Brescia—and that grows into clearer consciousness in the great critical movement of our time. It is a desire for the advance of humanity. "Man has put himself in the place of God," said the present Pope a few months ago. In a sense it is true. Humanity has at length taken over the control of its own destiny. It is not merely because the Church has in the past hindered the progress of humanity—fettered and opposed science, preached submission to disease and poverty, and diverted the devotion of the finest souls

in Europe to an ideal that it now itself discards. The Churches of our day are not the Churches of a hundred years ago. Even Catholicism will transform itself within fifty years, or perish. We could overlook the past; only taking care that it never return. But, quite apart from the past errors of Christianity, we have the most indisputable grounds for opposing it to-day. We see this: if man can be persuaded that *he* is the maker of this world (on its moral side) and there is no other world beside it, he will begin to work at its amelioration with an energy he never knew before. Test this principle, and the application of it which most nearly concerns women. If this social order, which oppresses them, is purely man-made, how straight and clear the way becomes for the task of re-making it; and how supremely important do we find the acceptance or rejection of this idea to have been in the early stages of the present women movement. Extend that principle to all the evils of our social order, and you have the key to the much-calumniated effort of the Rationalist to remove Christianity.

There is, to take the matter on a lower plane, a lack of intelligence in the idea that the individual or the society will tumble to ruin when belief in God or a future life decays. It is surely worth considering whether the Rationalist would not have this world better rather than worse, when he comes to think it is the only world he will ever know. When you look at it without prejudice, it seems an extraordinary notion to imagine that humanity should allow this life to take on the traditional features of hell because it discovers there is no heaven. It might occur to intelligent folk that we should be rather minded to build our Golden City here and now, when we find the

long-cherished vision of one in the clouds to be a mirage. The truth is that the mind of Europe has been vitiated by the dogma of the Fall. All that is evil and brutal in life and history has been ascribed to "human nature"; all that was elevated and refined and heroic has been denied to human nature, and attributed to "grace" or miracle. This has begotten a dreary pessimism in the mind of Christian people. They find themselves incapable of thinking that man can be generous or just or temperate without the hope of a reward in heaven or the stimulus of pleasing God. The mind of the Rationalist is not warped by this illusion. He takes men as he finds them. There are natures so diseased, so perverted by the spiritual selfishness of Christian teaching as popularly conceived, so debased by an environment that has remained poisonous throughout the whole dominion of the Church, that they do, and will, act viciously and unintelligently when the violent and crude curbs have been removed. They never really did act spiritually.

But the Rationalist sees that the natures which could respond to the finer appeals of modern Christianity are increasingly accessible to sentiments of humanity. This is not a theory, but a fact. The world grows more humane as it discards Christianity. That is the subtle grievance of the modern priest. The present high but narrow-minded Pope, in his perplexity, says it is the old practice of the devil imitating the angels of light. Reasonable people will avoid such fantastic notions, and recognise that humanity has at bottom a sound instinct. I have not said, of course, that the world grows more humane *because* it discards Christianity. I believe the fact is that it discards the old dogmas because it is

growing more humane. But, in either case, it is one of the most undeniable facts of modern history that humanism in philosophy has been accompanied, step by step, with humanity in character. The Rationalist believes that, when our philosophy of life is wholly humanist, the humanity of men and women will be greater than ever. He would tear the veil from the heavens and reveal its emptiness, because he knows that then at least men will turn to the brightening and gladdening of earth. He is fully and splendidly justified by the results that have steadily followed his demolition of the structure of dogma. There never yet was an age of such deep and widespread scepticism as this which witnesses a solemn Congress of the Freethinkers of Europe in the centre of Catholicism. And there was never yet an age so much adorned with humane and unselfish reforms, so full of promise of peace, justice, and gladness.

Before passing to a more definite suggestion, let me repeat that I am pleading for a *complete* humanism. If we take the women-writers of our time as a rough index to the mind of educated women, it seems clear that there is a growing tendency to relinquish ecclesiasticism and the more elaborate dogmas of the Church, but to concentrate almost intolerantly on the belief in God. A considerable number of the women-writers of to-day take up this position; the novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward or Miss Corelli will sufficiently illustrate it. This is only a prolonging of the process of the dissolution of beliefs. I have given a glimpse of the state of philosophic thought in regard to the belief in God. The dogma of a Personal God is being just as certainly undermined as the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope or

the Bible; and the new philosophic idea of Deity is one that cannot possibly sustain a superstructure of prayer or worship, or of any practical relation whatever between man and God. Now, it may be that the future will decide to believe in this impersonal and diffused Deity of these modern religious thinkers; and it may very well be that it will regard even this as no more than the vanishing ghost of the dead God. But, in either case, it is surely most ill advised to insist that the practical conduct of life shall still be based on a disputable and greatly disputed speculation. In the solid facts of life and history, in the plain teaching of experience as to what is needed to bring gladness into our lives, we have a broad and massive foundation to build upon. This is Humanism.

And, if I am asked to stoop to the demand of plain common sense for details, it is not impossible to do so. There is much light mockery of Humanism for its faith in the saving power of Science. It must be understood that this phrase chiefly means that we are going to substitute a most careful study of the conditions of happiness for the haphazard appeals and transcendental preaching of the past. Science is not a new goddess, nor a patent medicine for life's disorders. It is knowledge, but knowledge gleaned with particular care. On the practical side it is opposed to quackery: it is effective or practical knowledge gained, not by chance experiment, but by a most rigorous series of tests. We mean, then, that we are going to study this life, and extract from it the secret of happiness or unhappiness with a care and rigour that have not been applied to the task before. He who scorns this hardly commends his own philosophy of life. But, further, it is

quite possible to catch a glimpse of the various ways—for no sensible man expects to find some one panacea for all the ills of life—in which this work may be conducted. I have foreshadowed one of the most important of these already in dealing with the training of children. The education of the future will have to regard the whole child—body, mind, and character—as its province. Our educationists are only too willing to embrace and achieve this ideal of their work. It is easy to see, too, how the educational scheme will grow on another side; how the little systems of scholarships that are spreading out from every great school and education authority will grow on until they form a complete provision for the higher education of those for whom the higher training is fitted. A score of other tendencies in our actual social life will readily occur to any observer. Within this century war will be abolished, and twenty million men withdrawn from its bloody business to the arts of peace. Institutes of Social Service and Sociological Societies are being founded, which will correlate all the efforts for social reform that are being made throughout the world, and provide scientific guidance to reformers. Garden Cities and other experiments in betterment are being multiplied. We are only just realising that the social malady which Christianity has quite failed to cure—that spreading evil whose symptoms are drunkenness, prostitution, gambling, fraud, cruelty, and poverty—is a complex and deep-rooted disease that has never yet been understood, and so could not possibly have been cured.

The elimination of this disease is now seen to be possible. It is the work of Science—of knowledge acquired with infinite skill and applied with sympathy

and humanity. Ignorance or prejudice alone can scoff at this ennobling task that our godless generation has set itself. In every one of the reforms I have mentioned we have a new centre of light. Already the rays spread and meet over the intervening darkness. Before long we shall have this Knowledge, or Science, of the roots of our social malady; and we have already a great fund of humane and generous effort to apply it. What part the Churches will play in this depends solely on themselves. Because they at present insist on complicating our life with their speculations about a life beyond, because they tend to produce insincerity, which is poison to our social organism, humanitarians are ignoring them more and more. And until they have utterly ceased to lead the world astray from the task of its own advancement, until they have ceased to divert our resources and energies from the solid work of life to the futile tasks of worship and prayer, we shall oppose them relentlessly. In a spirit of sacred and healthy impatience — that spirit in which the great French nation is now casting off its Church — mankind will tolerate a clergy no longer. The sphere of their influence will go on shrinking until it becomes a mere fraction of life. But if they will abandon their dogmas, they may have an important share in the noble work that lies before humanity.

A distinguished Catholic prelate told me that he and a few other liberal ecclesiastics were discussing at Paris the future of the Church. "It is like this," said one of the most influential among them. "The Church actually presents the appearance of a venerable ivy-clad abbey. There are those who, shocked at its too obvious antiquity, would bring it down altogether. There are others, the ordi-

nary faithful, who would leave it as it is. But the better ideal is, as we propose, reverently to remove the ivy (the dogmas), and let the solid structure face the sunlight once more." There are many who would see an important truth in this theory of the modern Church and its needs. They believe the religious instinct to be an essential part of life, and the Churches to be, in some form or other, eternal. They would remove the creeds from them and make a religion of devotion to a moral ideal, to humanity, or to labour, or even of the sense of the mystery of life. A great number of modern writers take religion in this broader sense — Sir J. Seeley, Mr. Spencer, Mr. Lowes Dickenson, Sir Henry Thompson, Mr. Watson, and many others. To meet this attitude a number of the actual Churches will very clearly continue to exist in the form of Positivist and Ethical Churches, and it will be possible to adapt to their purposes all the finest music and some of the ritual of the Catholic Church. There need be no fear whatever that secession from the Churches means emotional starvation. Already a number of such institutions exist, many of them being churches or chapels that have shed their ancient creeds. In these every kind of service will be found, from elaborate ritualism to simple lectures on questions of ethics, politics, and literature. These congregations, in their various ways, foreshadow the evolution of the great Christian bodies.

For my part, I dream of a great federation of humanist agencies for rational culture. It seems to me that this new "religious" feeling, which is consulted by the bodies I have named, is only the lingering impression of the profound and world-old illusion which found its last

and highest form in Christianity. Careful observation of the working of Positivist and of the more ritualist Ethical Societies, of the general attitude of those who leave the Churches, and of the history of religion in the Far East, convinces me that religion is unnecessary in any shape or form. I believe there will be a very fair growth of congregations with a humanist religious service, but it seems impossible to think that the bulk of humanity will ever return to any discipline that calls itself religion, or anything with the remotest resemblance to a priesthood. The experience of Japan and China proves conclusively that it is possible to solve the problem of character through the educational system. Their schools, it must be remembered, though admirable in aim, are narrow and conservative in method. The same aim carried out by the more elastic and subtle methods of the finest Western education should give a superb

result. No further system of moral training or appeal should be necessary. Literature and public opinion would, as in China and Japan, do what remains to be done. Yet there will probably be an enormous growth among us, as the Churches decay, of Sunday Lecture Societies, Rationalist, Secular, Ethical, Humanitarian, and other Societies. If all these could be gathered into one national federation in each country, offering mutual help and comparing experiences, but having no shadow of priestly influence and no dogma but the free and rational guidance of humanity, we should have a successor to Christianity that would retain all its advantages and avoid all its defects. As the need for attacking theology and dogma disappeared, it would become a vast constructive, educative, and deliberative movement, watching over the progress of our ideas and institutions.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AN APPEAL

At the close of his interesting and shrewd *Anticipations*, Mr. H. G. Wells, our modern prophet, predicts that by the end of the twentieth century all educated men will have discarded Christianity, but women will be as much attached to it as ever. This is an appalling estimate of their intelligence. For my part, I do not share it for a moment, but there is no doubt that it is very widely held. In a vague way it is felt that the growing disproportion of

the sexes in attendance at public worship supports the prediction. Woman is more religious than man, more emotional, less intellectual. This is handed about as a truism to-day. Men raise their eye-brows when you venture to suggest the prophecy may prove abortive.

I invite the women who may read this essay to consider seriously what underlies this current estimate of them. At the bottom it is an insinuation that they either cannot discriminate between



truth and untruth as easily as men can, or that they are singularly indifferent about the truth or untruth of the ideas they hold most dear. The one alternative is an imputation of inferior intelligence; the other is not a compliment to their moral nature. How long are women going, not merely to tolerate, but to repeat with a laugh, these suggestions of mental inferiority, so long as men gild them with flattery of their persons or their charming ways? Just as I write this chapter the journals announce that a brilliant woman-writer, Mrs. Craigie, has been helping a group of conservative lawyers to prove that woman is unfit to serve on the jury. No doubt she would promptly reject any personal application of the stigma, but she fastens it on her sex generally with pitiful rhetoric. The figure of Justice, she points out, has always been regarded as a female, but blind-folded, figure. That is to indicate, she approvingly adds, that woman "cannot see straight." Mrs. Craigie is a Roman Catholic. She probably accepts entirely the prediction that the Catholic Church is going to survive the storms of the twentieth century, and that it will be composed, mainly, of a male pastorate and a vast female following—with a few artists.

This is a matter which women must face courageously. When men predict that they themselves will, as a body, desert the Churches, they do not mean that they shrink from their moral restraints. They mean that the culture of the modern world has reached a point at which we can foresee the total collapse of the teaching of the Churches from the intellectual point of view. In other words, they believe or suspect that the ideas still preached from the pulpit are *untrue*; and that they themselves

are sufficiently alert in mind and sufficiently informed in thought to see this untruth, and act on the discovery. Can any woman hesitate to recognise what the prediction really means as regards herself? It means, in plain English, that these men believe she has either not mind enough to perceive, or knowledge enough to appreciate, the change, or else she is so wedded to emotional gratification (vaguely called "spiritual") that she deliberately ignores the suspicion cast on her beliefs. Can any woman contemplate without a stir the irony of such a spectacle as these prophets are calling up from the mists of the future? If there ever were such a division of humanity as regards religion—if all the more active, more trained, more informed minds were to be ranged against Christianity, and all the less active minds, and less educated people, and more confusedly emotional natures were gathered about the clergy—there would be no need for Rationalistic criticism.

As I have said, I think the estimate is hopelessly false, and I believe that Mr. Wells has since greatly moderated his forecast. Women are being profoundly stirred over this great question of the truth or untruth of traditional religious views. The Rationalist lecturer, who but a few years ago addressed almost exclusively masculine audiences, now often finds thirty, and even fifty, per cent. of his audience to consist of ladies. Gradually it is breaking on their minds that the old discarded ideal of "woman's sphere" was the ideal of the clergy; that there is some significance in the fact that the attack on it was led by Rationalist women; that there is still a painful absence of clerical support from their most cherished causes. When a Women's Suffrage Society has to publish a special

proof that clerical leaders to-day *do not oppose* their aim, one begins to think. Gradually it is becoming clear to women that a great controversy rages in the world about them as to the truth of the ideas they have too tamely received, too dogmatically imposed on their children.

Let women rise and shake from their sex once for all this stigma of indifference to intellectual movements, this honied insinuation of mental inferiority, this suspicion that they care not whether the basic ideas of their spiritual life are true or untrue. There are men about them on all sides to-day who welcome their determination to lift themselves from the groove in which their life has run, and claim their share in the world's work. It is not their fault that hitherto their sphere of interest, of education, and of action has been so narrow. It is the work of men, especially of priests; and, in the mighty task of breaking the inertia of their sex generally, they very justly call for the aid of men. But it is none the less true that to-day the fields of culture are open to all who will walk into them. Light is cheaper to-day than it ever was in the history of the world. No masculine selfishness (except in rare cases) now fences off the thoughts of the world from woman's life.

There is here, perhaps, a double complaint and the need for a double appeal. Active women, trying almost in despair to quicken the lethargy of their sex, complain that men will not help to undo the evil they have so largely wrought. The complaint is a just one. The Rationalist who would rouse woman from her unquestioning acquiescence in superstition must be content—nay, should long—to see her roused and active on every great issue of life. Many women are to-day looking with a new yearning over the

narrow enclosures we have built about them. They are demanding—and it is a noble demand—that we admit them to work at our side in the building of the Golden City that is to be. They have the fullest right to ask the aid of men in the work of spreading that feeling among their sisters, and of casting down the fences by which we have so long kept them out of public life. Rationalism must be comprehensive, if it claim to be based on a principle, and not on mere feeling.

On the other hand, we men have an equal right to ask women to be comprehensive. Not very long ago I heard a conversation between two women-workers in a London club, in the course of which one of them spoke of a man who offered help in their cause as “an Agnostic.” “Oh! I draw the line there,” said the second lady, with a shudder. She was probably completely ignorant that Agnostics and Atheists were among the first friends of her cause when to espouse it meant the ridicule of one's fellow-men. In any case, it is time that women ceased to draw lines such as this that are wholly without justification. It is time that they saw the fallacy of asking men to examine their cause rationally and dispassionately, while they themselves fence off one set of their opinions or prejudices as immune from criticism. What, after all, does the Rationalist ask of them? Merely a candid inquiry into the grounds of their convictions. The ideas that shirk inquiry are half condemned from that fact alone. Truth never grew paler and thinner the more you looked into it. “A fine jewel,” to use the words of a religious thinker, Sir Oliver Lodge, “only flashes the brighter when turned about so as to expose every facet to the light.” How many women

have distinguished themselves in the religious controversy of our time? They now write able works on astronomy, law, history, art, economics, sociology, fiction. Yet, with all their preponderant attachment to religion, not one of them has put forward a serious defence of her theology.

Finally, I would point out to the thoughtful women of our time that men are taking their attitude towards religion as a measure of what their influence would be in other provinces of life. As yet they are excluded from exerting any direct influence on political, civic, or economic life. What use would they make of it when they have obtained it? If you would know, many men reply, study their action in the only matter on which they have influence—religion. The women, co-operating with the clergy, make the religion of each succeeding generation. Do they do this with eyes wide open, with a full sense of responsibility, from deliberate and rational conviction? They do not, as a rule. Comparatively few of them read much of the literature that is poured out annually on the subject of religious evidence. Women's journals dare not mention the current impeachment of conventional theology. They take the authority of priests or of tradition almost without question. They suffer, and cause, endless pain by their unreasoning denunciation of every friend or relative that "loses the faith." How, in the face of all this, can they expect men to welcome their influence in other matters? They say, in effect: We do not wish to reason about religion. We will not examine

the bases of our convictions. We will not even ask ourselves whether they are only based on authority or tradition, and if the authority or tradition is sound. We will go on acting on these convictions in the matter of religion without using our judgment on them. But we will do precisely the reverse in political and civic affairs if you will grant us a participation therein. In those matters we will lightly accept no authority, will brush our minds clear of all prejudice or conventional bias, will weigh our convictions and act with a full sense of responsibility. It is time that women saw the incongruity and unwisdom of this position.

I do not need to be reminded that almost all I have said applies to very many men, and, on the other hand, by no means applies to all women. I am trying for the moment to reach that large class of women who shrink from the discussion or examination of their religious ideas. I plead that they at least ask themselves seriously *why* they shrink from such inquiry. As mothers of the race, they have a profound and far-reaching influence on its progress in ideas, and they have a corresponding responsibility. The days are gone for ever when ascetic priests could exclude them from the "sacrament" as unclean, and Puritan divines could bid them keep their lips sealed on all public questions. Let them rise to the height of their opportunity, and prove that they are not too docile to priestly dictation, too indifferent to truth or untruth, too confused in mind to discriminate between them, to be admitted into the work of the world.



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