

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

of the Rhone at a later age, should have excited throughout Western Christendom the utmost horror and indignation. It is eloquent evidence of the punitive power of the Church at this time that no punishment whatever for this outrage was inflicted either upon Fredegund or her accomplices. Brunehild and Fredegund "are fit heroines for the most sanguinary of the Teutonic sagas, in which they appear much distorted and amidst different surroundings, but with a manifest parentage of fact and suggestion. They were mortal enemies, and it would be hard to say which was the more implacable, but perhaps Fredegund's crimes were the most fiendish and unprovoked. . . . We shall look in vain through history for a woman capable of more deliberate, sustained, and successful murders than those by which she carved her path to the throne, advanced the cause of her husband so long as it suited her that he should live, removed every possible rival to her son Chlothair, and transferred the crown from father to son, as soon as Chlothair had reached what in those days was regarded as the age of militant manhood."¹

H. J. WARNER.



ART. VI.—THE PLACE AND WORK OF EMANCIPATED
WOMANHOOD.

I REMEMBER proposing, as a member of the committee on a Diocesan Conference, certain subjects more or less suitable for discussion, of which one was, "The place of women in Church." A layman, also on the committee, at once thundered out, "Woman's place? In the *back seats!*" To which the reply was obvious: "But if they will not stay there?" And this declares just the state of things with regard to women in the present day. They will not take the back seats, either in Church or anywhere else; they *will* come to the front. We hear continually of woman's emancipation, of woman's claims, of the equality of the sexes. A woman's revolution menaces our ancient Universities, and women have already claimed their right to a share in that *one* only department of "wrangling" which, "before," man's exclusiveness had deemed peculiarly his own. As magistrates and guardians, and even as churchwardens, they "rise with twenty weighty reasons on their tongues, and push us from our stools." Into the domains of coarseness, and even into the Zola preserves of mere filth, the woman-novelist presses. We have lady doctors—in America, "Reverend" ladies—compilers even of a "Woman's Bible,"

¹ "The Franks," by Lewis Sergeant.

in which Eve is complimented for not having rather succumbed to the temptation of beautiful dresses, than to that of godlike knowledge; and in which, as the type of feminine endurance and wisdom, is put forward—the ass of Balaam! Subordination is being disclaimed by wife and daughter, and Gladstone's famous predecessor (I allude, of course, to Ahasuerus), if he, in the present day, were to issue his edict of Home Rule, recorded in the last verse of the first chapter of the Book of Esther, might evoke only derisive defiance. The *Summer Fantasy*¹ of Tennyson, which appeared just fifty years ago, has become in great measure a reality, and women own, nowadays, more than one "College like a man's," though, happily, not yet have they prevailed on "our old Halls to change their sex." And although (at least, in my limited experience) we see not in the lady's colleges

" Prudes for proctors, dowagers for deans,
And sweet girl graduates with their golden hair,"

but rather spectacled severities, and forms and faces dedicated to *Learning*—and not grudged to her by *Love*.

Among the many changes, for worse or for better, of "Great Victoria's golden reign," which began as a monarchy and ended as a monarchical republic, this change in the position and attitude of the woman is one of the most startling. Now, the clergy are deeply concerned in the change. They should be pre-eminently the teachers of the nation, in the exercise of the Master's commission to not only feed (*βόσκειν*), but to "shepherd" (*ποιμαίνειν*) His flock. Their influence should extend not only to religion and morality, but also to decorum and seemliness in those committed to their care, even as St. Paul thought it not beneath an Apostle's dignity to speak of the dress of women, of the fitness for them, in worship, of the veiled head, and of the *adornment* to them of shamefastness and modesty. This being so, it seems right that the clergy should take into consideration what should be their attitude towards this woman's question, what their influence over it. How far it may appear their duty to stem the advancing flood; how far to direct it into proper channels, and, with the setting of proper bounds, to encourage its advance.

In the first place, I think we must own that through man's masterfulness, and, it may be, jealousy and want of true appreciation of the requirements, physical and mental, of women, and of their capacities, women *were*, even sixty years ago, too much kept "in the back seats."

¹ "This were a medley! We should have him back
Who told the 'Winter's Tale' to do it for us."

Princess: Prologue.

So Lilia, in "The Princess," being twitted with the great doings of a heroine of the past, has some right in her retort :

"Quick answered Lilia : ' There are thousands, now,
Such women, but convention beats them down ;
It is but bringing up—no more than that ;
You men have done it ; how I hate you all !
Give us for teaching all that men are taught,
We are twice as quick !'"

And, indeed, woman has her roll-call of celebrities :

"She
That taught the Sabine how to rule, and she
The foundress of the Babylonian wall,
The Carian Artemisia strong in war,
The Rhodope that built the pyramid,
Clelia, Cornelia, with the Palmyrene
That fought Aurelian, and the Roman horde
Of Agrippina."

And sings of woman the woman's Laureate :

"Her privilege, not impotence,
Exempts her from the work of man—
Humbling his proper excellence.
Jean d'Arc led war's obstreperous van,
No part of policy or pride
Does Heaven from her holding grudge ;
Miriam and Anna prophesied,
In Israel Deborah was judge,
How many Christian heroines
Have blest the world, and still do bless ;
The praise their equal courage wins
Is tenfold thro' their tenderness.

"If man, in war, fear none as foes,
Before disease the brave will pale ;
But woman fearless frontage shows,
Headed by Florence Nightingale !

"And, ah ! sad times, gone by,¹ denied
The joyfullest omen ever seen,
The full-grown lion's power and pride
Led by the soft hands of a Queen !"

Women, we may own, were too much kept back in the early part of this century. But certainly we are now brought face to face with the opposite evil. The somewhat over-restrained espalier is in danger now of growing into rank, ungraceful excess of wood, from which the blush of the blossom and the refreshment of the fruit are apt to become conspicuously absent.

The clergy—provided incomes be left them sufficient to make a married clergy still a possibility—should rear in their

¹ Revived in "Great Victoria's golden days."

homes sweet English maidens of the true old strain; physically and mentally healthy, *mens sana in corpore sano*; natural, sweet, and serviceable; acceptable to God and man; wise concerning good, *simple concerning evil*; unseared by foul literature; fearless for the truth; exacting chivalry from mankind¹; without prudishness, yet not cheapening their society; in no least way mannish; with sweet lips, free from smoking and from slang; womanly, yes, *gentle-womanly*. It is a pity that we have taken up the inapt word "lady," which is correlative to "lord," and dropped the sweet feminine of "gentleman." (This Ruskin deplores in his lovely book for youths and girls, "Sesame and Lilies.") We shall wisely allow many things that our fathers disallowed, but we shall guard against *liberty* running to seed in *license*. Good daughters we shall rear; helpful and amiable sisters; women modest and wise in counsel, gentle and firm in rule in *woman's* department—Christian Maidens, thus full of promise to make the perfect Wife. So that with such a one,

"Seeing her so sweet and serviceable,"

it may fare, as fared it with Enid, when Geraint thought and said, seeing Yniol's daughter :

"Here, by God's grace, is the one maid for me!"

But "these are generals," you may complain. "Come to particulars, man!"

Let us consider, then, what should be our ideal, to inculcate, of woman's place (1) in the Church and in the parish; (2) of woman's place in the world at large.

I need not here emphasize, with regard to her, the department of her Home. This is surely, it must be granted, her peculiar sphere. As wife, mother, mistress, she must take her place, and no one can assume her part. The loss of a wife, of a mother, ought to be the severest loss a home can experience. The loss of a wise and judicious father leaves, as Steerforth lamented, a terrible want. But the very nature of his work precludes his constant supervision and superintendence at home. I *have* seen a forlorn old cock on a branch, sheltering under his wings, with rueful expression, a motherless brood. It was a pathetic sight, but the poor old male bird, with his many calls during the daytime, could look neither after the wants nor the behaviour of the giddy young chicks in that daytime, nor guard them from prowling fox or hovering hawk.

¹ See, further, my "Old and New Century Bells" (Wells Gardner, Darton and Co., 1901).

Woman's special sphere, then, is the home. Her function there is that taken by Patmore for the title of his book; she should be "The Angel in the House." She may indeed be an angel of either kind—a Demon of discord, or a Messenger of peace; a factor of dissension, or a minister of love; a maker, or a healer of wounds.

At home indeed she may be and should be—

"The best half of creation's best,
The heart to feel, its eye to see;
The crown and complex of the rest,
Its aim and its epitome."

Indeed, for all that need be said as to woman's place in the home I may refer to Coventry Patmore's poetry, and to the eulogium, never, I trust, to become out of date, of wife, mother, and mistress in the closing chapter of the Book of Proverbs.

In the Church, women are coming out of the "back seats." We hear now of female churchwardens. I own I do not like the idea, nor think it should be encouraged. Better officers they would make, I do not deny, than many of those now installed, caring little for the Church, and, often, not even Communicants. Still, at any rate, if a man can be found apt and fit, I should certainly give the preference to the old custom. We must remember that one of the duties of a churchwarden is to keep order—it may be among brawlers and unruly young men—in the church. This does not seem to my mind to be woman's work.

In one of my curacies a lady sometimes collected the money at the Offertory. I own that it had to me an *unnatural*, if not unseemly, appearance. Why? Well, perhaps because something of a retiring modesty, which we love to see in the woman, or *used* to love to see, seemed incongruous with the open and public solicitation.

Let that pass. I do not see anything that should not be in a vicar's daughter, after a Celebration—while he is attending to the vessels, etc., he having no server—stepping from the vestry through a side-opening into the sanctuary, and taking flagon, alms-bags, etc., to put by so as to save time. I must protest against the idea, which seems with some clergy to obtain, that it is a sort of desecration for a female to enter the Sanctuary. We think of them as far purer than are men, and certainly our Lord in person found no pollution in their ministry nor in their adoring touch. No, not in that of the poor penitent who laved His feet from the fountain of her heart, and dried them with the woman's glory.

We may as well take in any instance that is of kin to our

subject. Should maidens sit in the choir-stalls, and be, in fact, of the choir; and if so, is a special garb for them desirable? Certainly here, if there be without them treble voices sufficient, I would relegate them, at any rate, to the back seats as assessors; but where these trebles are not found I cannot see anything ecclesiastically wrong in maidens assisting to lead congregational singing (which should be our ultimate aim), and sharing the privilege of the other sex in dedicating to God "the best member that we have." And I think a white cloak and college cap might be conceded. Certainly we, with no demur, accept the services of lady organists and lady pre-centors.

The question may here come in, "Are women in our day, contrary to St. Paul's dictum, to be suffered to speak in the Church?" Believing in the permanency of the rules of the Book given to us through Prophets and Apostles, I say, Certainly not. I am aware that a woman modern critic, carrying out the corrective and "probability" criticism of the day, on being reminded of St. Paul's rule, "I suffer not women to speak in the Church," retorted, "Ah yes! But in that place Paul forgot to add, 'I speak as a fool.'"

But, out of the Church's walls, should we set our face against the speaking, lecturing, and teaching of women?

I think that here we must discriminate, hardly, however, venturing to draw a hard-and-fast line. I cannot say that it seems to me *feminine*¹ for a woman to speak from political and secular platforms, and to jostle, on subjects out of her peculiar province, with the man. And this although I own that to the unmarried *femme sole*, owner of estate or farm, it does seem that woman's suffrage should be conceded. It seems absurd for the field-labourer to possess it, in his ignorant unfitness to enjoy the privilege of misusing the vote-power given to him, while his mistress, cultivated and with education, has it denied to her. Nor do I think that personal considerations would more powerfully sway the emotional nature than it does the (in the case of the field-labourer) fallow mental faculty.

But to return to our maidens. With regard to secular platforms, then, I would still apply the old saying of Homer:

"Ill fits it female virtue to be seen,
Alone, indecent, 'mid the haunts of men."

But what shall we say concerning subjects peculiarly within the woman's province, and concerning religious teaching, at any rate, outside the walls of the Church: such teaching in

¹ A word I fain would keep, *pace* the twentieth century.

the school, in the tent, in the mission-room? I think few would be bold enough to forbid the work of a Mrs. Marsh, of an Ellice Hopkins, of those other ladies who are, in our own day, exercising such wonderful influence over our soldiers, militia, and sailors; over our village and town lads, also, in the Bible-class and the night-school. Here, surely, we do allow teaching, even in the form of earnest address and exposition, also the reading of prayers and the leading in thanksgiving and praise. I think, in woman's teaching, a certain *fitness* of things will show the way to the mean between restraint and license.

There are subjects, painful and tainted, whose discussion and treatment yet especially concern woman. There is the unjust unevenness of the balance held by society in its estimate of the deviation from the path of virtue—a deviation regarded, in the one case as ruin, in the other, as more than venial, even as a thing of course. This can hardly be otherwise (from the world's point of view) from the very nature of things. There is, indeed, an implied homage in it to woman; a relic of the worship of the days of chivalry. Man, coarse man! what matters (men ask) a stain more or less on the rough Oak? But on the Lily the case is different. Man we know as man merely. But man's thought loves to place woman among the angels, so that

"When she falls, she falls like Lucifer,
Never to rise again!"

But abstractedly, and from the point of view of the *sin* of it, there seems, and is, an injustice. Should not, then, the woman protest? Now, I maintain that the protest, somewhat unsavoury, of the lip and the pen, may be rendered less necessary by a silent protest, which is entirely in the woman's power. Let her, *as she can* in society, insist on chivalry among men. Let the chartered libertine find no charter from her, as a guest in her home, as a suitor of her daughters—no, not were he ten times a lord or a millionaire.

In truth, we must blame woman's laxity and cheapening of herself—must, I say, blame also, sometimes, the wiles of the woman—for the low standard of chivalry, of purity, at any rate in our country parishes.

There has been much difference of opinion as to woman's work in the parish, especially that of the parson's wife and daughters. Mrs. Creighton would seem to speak of the parish as having almost the first claim on the time of the wife, mother, and mistress. To this I should demur. Others deny that the parish has any claim: a woman does not marry a man to become his curate. For my part, I

would earnestly advise any zealous young priest who thinks of taking to himself a wife to most carefully avoid the girl who could think or talk of interest in the Master's work, not to speak of its being also that of her husband, in a way so flippant, selfish, and un-Christlike. Let the wife be shunned who would regard with distaste or with indifference the chief and dearest interest in life of her husband. Such a one—whereas a true and sympathetic helpmeet would double his influence for good and incalculably lighten his toil—such a Gallic-wife will do him incredible harm, will hamper and hinder his efforts, will undermine his influence, and, it may be, ere the end, make the man himself half-hearted and a shirk.

Here, again, the truth lies in the mean. Let the wife be

“ True to the *kindred* points of Heaven and Home.”

Let the one point of the compass be fixed firmly in the centre. She need not then fear to enlarge the circle embraced by the other.

It is more than time to end. We must not dwell at length generally on what the clergy, what parents should disallow, what permit, in woman's new relation with the world. Here, again, old Horace may help us with his well-worn dicta: “ *Est modus in rebus; sunt certi denique fines.*” The line was drawn far too hard and fast, we must, I think, concede, “ in the days when we were young.” I remember that it was unfeminine to skate; I have read of the astonishment of the artist, Millais, on seeing a girl playing the violin. It was, I believe, thought an over-fast thing for a woman to be seen in a hansom cab. I know not how our grandfathers would have looked at lawn-tennis or golf for girls. I myself was, I own, together with many who are not quite fogies, yet much set against the bicycle for maid and matron. However, the thing became no longer singular and conspicuous, conditions which (though I grant there must be pioneers) I dislike for women. And since I saw no harm in tricycles for them, it seemed at last an absurdity to hold out as to the number of wheels when once the machine had been adapted to modest feminine attire. It was urged once, I recall, by an indignant matron, “ That the Virgin Mary would not have used one.” Well, we don't know! Certainly she would not if they be immodest. But *are* they? I decided *not*.

Then in our day girls whistle; only boys did this, in my time. I disliked the innovation. But before demurring I put to myself the query, “ Why not? What is there, *per se*, in the act of whistling unfeminine or objectionable? I really could find no answer, so held my peace.

Against certain attempts of the new woman I set my canon

inflexibly. I like not men in women's places. Still more I dislike the unwomaned woman. Any occupation, any position, any practice, which is unwomanly I condemn. And an innate fitness of things will, I maintain, decide here. Place the statue, side by side of the Farnese Hercules and that of the Venus de Medici, and say whether God meant no distinction to obtain between the functions and department of man and woman. The female soldier or policeman, the female legislator or magistrate, these I cannot allow. The female guardian of the poor I love not to see. Female "cricketers" (I do not include girls playing together in the home field), female footballers—well, I would settle the question, so far as cricket goes, and show the farce by setting Richardson to bowl at them! Man's dress, coming to zenith of horror in the "rational costume" of "women—or what have been those gracious things"—in cycling—of this I wholly disapprove. The fast girl, or the horsy woman; let neither men, nor girls, nor bookmakers endure them. Slang from a girl's cherry lips is odious, unendurable. Smoking! Ah, let not the lips of his lady-love, as she whispers a soft "Yes" into her lover's ear, recall to him the odour of the stale pipe that hangs in the rack in his bachelor-room!

In fine, let the woman remain the woman, the girl the girl. We want to raise us, to help us, and comfort us, something different from ourselves: *the woman*, not a bad and second-hand imitation of *the man*.¹ Let, then, in this woman-question of our day, the influence of the man, especially of the man of God, be

"To clear away the parasitic forms
That seem to keep her up, but drag her down—
To leave her space to burgeon out of all
Within her; let her make herself her own
To give or keep, to live and learn, and be
All that not harms distinctive womanhood."

J. R. VERNON.

¹ "For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse: could we make hence the man,
Sweet love were slain; his dearest bond is this.
Not like to like, but like in difference."

