

WHAT WOMEN OWE TO CHRISTIANITY.

(From an Article by Right Rev. Bishop Spalding, in the North American Review.)
CAUSES OF THE PRESENT INHUMANITY TO WOMAN.

It is not difficult to account for this worldwide inhumanity of man to woman. Throughout all pre-Christian history the law of superior strength was the rule of conduct. The strongest governed, and governed in virtue of their strength, and not in virtue of any moral sanction or divine authority.

"The good old plan
That should take who has the power,
And he should keep who can."

This is at all times true of savage and barbarous hordes; and it is, in a general way, true of the Pagan states of Greece and Rome. The notion that man has duties to his fellow-men, even though he be wholly in his power, did not enter into the view of human life. Captives, therefore, might be put to death, or reduced to a state of slavery worse than death. The slave was a chattel; the master was free to treat him as he pleased, his ass or his dog. Among Pagans, the later stoics were the first to teach that masters are bound by ties of moral obligation to their slaves, and how far these views may have been the result of Christian influences it is not easy to determine. When strength is made the measure of right, woman is inevitably driven to the wall. Nature, in making her a mother, makes her weak—takes a part of her blood, her mind, and her heart to give it to another. Child-bearing and child-rearing place her at a disadvantage. Were she even physically stronger and mentally more capable than man, the infirmities and duties inseparable from her sex would make it impossible for her to cope with him in the life struggle. Hence, wherever the law of strength has been accepted as the rule of life, man has treated woman as Petrarch proposed to treat Katherina:

"I will be master of what is mine own;
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything."

The savage went wife-hunting as he went wolf or bear-hunting, and brought the captive home to be his slave. The barbarian, too, captured his woman in war, or bought her. The civilized Pagan was a polygamist, or at least looked upon himself as wholly free from all obligations of marital fidelity. If this be, in general outlines, the history of women except in Christendom, it is pertinent to ask whether the Christian religion bears any causal relation to her actual position in the civilized world. When Christ came, woman, like the slave, was everywhere without honor, without freedom, without hope. Men, bearing the curse of their own depravity, sank into the depths of moral infamy to which they had reduced the poor and the weak. Surrounded by human herds to whom vice in its most degrading forms had become a second nature, they breathed an atmosphere of corruption in which the moral sense perished. Life grew to be a kind of remittent fever, alternating between lust and blood. Here and there a stray voice protested, but only in tones of despair. The masses of mankind—the slave and the woman—had been reduced to a state so pitiable that nothing short of the coming of God Himself, in sorrow and in weakness, could have inspired the courage even to dream of better things. Hope had fled; the world was prostrate; in the nephritic air of unnatural, sensual indulgence the soul was stifled; woman had lost even the attractiveness of sex, and a thousand slaves could hardly feed the stomach of a Diva. To such a world Jesus Christ came, and took Lazarus in his arms, and called upon all who believed in God to follow him in the service of outraged humanity. Before any moral progress could be hoped for, new ideas had to be grafted in the human mind, ideas as to what man is in himself, as to what is due him in virtue of his very nature; new doctrines concerning the duties of all men to all men, and especially of the strong to the weak, of the rich to the poor, of man to woman.

EXTENT OF THE CHANGE BROUGHT BY CHRIST'S COMING.

Christ sees the soul. The soul determines the value of human life, and the soul of the child, of the slave, of woman, is as sacred as the soul of Caesar. "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." That which is supreme in Christ is love. He pours the boundless love of God into the channels of which human life flows. In His presence upglows the purest, the strongest, the most unquenchable love that exists or has existed on earth; and He turns this stream of divine charity into the desert of human wretchedness and woe, to refresh and gladden the hearts of the poor and the forlorn, of the slave and the beggar, and of woman, the great outcast of humanity. He sends those who love Him to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to visit the sick. Wherever a human being suffers wrong or want, there Christ is to be loved and to be served. Honor is not so much the father of all our poetry, nor Socrates so much the master of all our intellectual discipline, as is Christ the fountain-head of the humanitarian love that makes men helpful to the weak and the wronged. In lifting the soul into the full light of God's presence, he not only gave a new measure of the value of light, but a new meaning to authority. The supremacy of force is supplanted by the supremacy of truth and justice, of love and mercy. Slaves and beggars will now appeal from Emperors and Senates to God, in the name of the soul, redeemed by Christ. Henceforth, to be man is to be God-like.

TO BE AN EMPEROR, IS TO BE HUMAN.

In the light of this truth, woman becomes the equal of man. Hence the polygamy is abolished, and marriage is of one with one, and for life. Wedded love becomes sacramental love, and the tenderness with which Christ loves his Church, the symbol of the love of husband for wife, "He that loveth his wife," says St. Paul, "loveth himself. For no man ever loved his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ

doth His Church." Thus the family becomes a lesser church, the home a sanctuary, and woman is God's providence, sitting by each man's hearth-fire. Eve withdraws, and the Virgin Mary in made the ideal woman. No Amazon here, no Spartan mother, no stern mother of the Gracchi, no goddess of sensual love, no fair slave of man's animal appetites; but woman, pure, gentle, tender, loving, patient, strong; the world's benefactress, because, through her, divine manhood lives on earth, and peace, love, mercy, and righteousness prevail. With this new ideal of womanhood, the exaltation of the beauty and moral worth of perfect chastity is intimately associated. The selfishness of man, which is chiefly shown in the indulgence of the sensual passions, is woman's most terrible enemy. Love is pure and gentle; lust is coarse and brutal. Love is born of the soul, and not of the sense; and when this celestial flower first blooms under the eyes of a pure youth and a fair maiden, they are lifted to infinite heights, and the sad side of love is the disenchantment that comes when they are awakened from their dream. Nothing tends more to exalt the passion of pure love than reverence for virginity, real belief in the sacredness of womanly virtue. They only are worthy of the love of woman who, like King Arthur's knights, bind themselves—

"To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds."
This exaltation of womanly virtue is the most emphatic assertion of the truth that woman does not exist simply for man; that the sphere of her activity is not bounded by the duties of wife and mother. She may love Jesus Christ, and, with no man for her husband, become a ministering angel of light and love to the world. Purity, meekness, patience, faith and love—these are the virtues that Our Blessed Lord most emphasizes—are, above all, womanly virtues. He does not exalt intellect, courage and strength, but gentleness and lovingness and helpfulness. The Christian hero even, like all heroines, shows his supreme strength in suffering rather than in doing.

To the most wretched phase even of woman's existence the Saviour has brought the healing of His heavenly grace. In all literature, sacred and profane, there is nothing so touching, so tender and consoling, as the Gospel episode of Magdalene; and he who looks with more complacency upon Aspasia with Plato at her feet, than upon Magdalene at the feet of Jesus, is self-condemned. If we take a view of Christian history in the light of the ideals that Christ has given us, there is, of course, disappointment. The ideal never comes real in this earthly existence, and since even the best reach not these heights, the multitude, of course, remain far below.

Ideals are like the mountain peaks that gleam amid the azure heavens; we look up to them with delight, but the ascent wears, and when on the summit we find the air too fine for our course, breathing, and in the solitude we miss the crowd and grow lonely. Nevertheless, on these snow-capped heights are born the spring showers and the summer rains, which nourish the growing corn and the ripening grain. But if Christian society has not realized its ideals concerning woman, it has never been with our elevating and refining influence. To the action of the Church in the middle ages we are indebted for the monogamic family, which lies at the basis of our civilization, and is the stronghold of all that is best in our social life. Had not

POPE AND BISHOPS

withstood kings and barons when they sought to continue the polygamous practices that among the German barbarians were lawful, monogamy would have perished among the ruling classes of Europe; and with the development of popular power, had such development been possible, women would have fallen to the place that she to-day occupies in Mohammedan countries. Indeed, the preservation of all Western Europe from the blight of Mohammedanism is due to the action of the Church, which united, and was alone able to unite, the warring factions of western semi-barbarians, and to hurl them, century after century, against the strongholds of the hordes whose dream of Heaven was a place of sensual delights. The objection has often been urged that in making man

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

the Church is unjust to woman. But the family is an organic unity, and cannot exist without subordination and authority. Either the husband or the wife must be the depository of domestic authority, and unless it can be shown that woman is better fitted than man to exercise this power, no injustice has been done. Physically, man is stronger than woman; he is better able to confront the world, and to do the work by which the members of the family are maintained in health and comfort. Historically, society grows out of a warlike and barbarous state of life, and since women are less fitted for war than men, the defence of property and rights is naturally entrusted to those whose hands hold the sword. But it is not necessary to examine into the genesis and evolution of society to find reasons for giving the headship of the family to man; we need but look into the heart of woman to see there an impulse as strong as love to look up and follow the man she loves. Between man and woman there ought to be no question of superiority or inferiority; they are unlike, and in nothing do they differ more than in their relative power to escape from their impressions.

A WOMAN UNDERSTANDS ONLY WHAT SHE FEELS.

whereas a man may grow to be able to look at things as they are in themselves, while indifferent to their relations to himself. Hence women are superior to men in those virtues which are the essential element in right feeling. They believe more, hope more, and love more than men. They are more compassionate, more capable of remaining faithful to those who are unworthy of their love, because they consider only the love they feel, and give comparatively little heed to its object. Men, on the other hand, are superior in the virtues that spring

less from sentiment, and depend rather on the nature of things, their eternal fitness, as justice, fortitude, equanimity, wisdom, prudence.

This difference in character determines their position in domestic and social relations; nor would there be gain for either man or woman if they could be made less unlike. The charm as well as the helpfulness of their relations lies in their differences and not in their likeness. They are complementary; each needs the qualities of the other, and their wants are the bond of union. The opposition of men and women to so-called woman's rights comes doubtless in many instances from a belief that to throw woman into public life is to make her less womanly. Nor gods nor men love a manly woman or a womanish man. The unfairness with which woman is treated in the legislation of the medieval epoch may be traced to the barbarous ideas of woman that partially survived in European countries after our ancestors had been converted to Christianity; nor has this injustice yet disappeared from the statute books of the civilized nations.

The causes that have led to the improvement of woman's condition among the Christian nations are, in general, the same that have developed our civilization. Whatever influences have been active in the abolition of slavery in securing popular rights, free government, protection of children and the poor, in bringing knowledge within the reach of all, and thereby spreading abroad juster and more humane principles of conduct, have also wrought for the welfare of woman, and it is not necessary to point out how intimately all this progress is associated with the social action of the Christian religion. The spirit of chivalry is the outgrowth of the Christian ideal of womanhood. To maintain that Christianity crushed out

THE FEMINE ELEMENTS

and more than all other influences combined, plunged the world into the dark ages, is to indulge in a kind of declamation that, for the past half century at least, has become impossible to enlightened minds. To say the doctrine of Original Sin throws the guilt exclusively or chiefly on woman, is merely to affirm one's ignorance of Christian teaching. St. Ambrose, one of the four great doctors of the Western Church, declares that woman's fault in the original fall was less than that of man, as her bearing was, beyond question, more generous. And then the Catholic Church at least teaches that Mary has more than made good any wrong that Eve may have done. To assert that in the Christian religion "the goddess is a trinity of males" is to be at once ignorant and coarse; it is neither male nor female, as in Christ there is neither male nor female. To proclaim that the Christian religion teaches that "woman is an afterthought in creation, sex a crime, marriage a condition of slavery for woman and delirium for man, and maternity a curse," is to mistake rant for reason, declamation for argument. In fact, the advocates of woman's rights too often take this false and therefore offensive tone. They speak like people who have grievances, and to have a grievance is to be a bore. They scold, and when women scold, whether in public or in private, men may not be able to answer them, but they grow sullen and cease to be helpful.

TO BE PERFECT WOMAN MUST BE AMABLE.

and to be strong, she must speak from a loving heart, and not from a sour mind. Whoever is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christianity must sympathize with all movements having as their object the giving to woman the full possession of her rights. No law that is unjust to her should exist in Christendom. She should not be shut out from any career that offers to her the means of an honest livelihood. For the same work she should receive the same wages as a man, and should hold her property in virtue of the same right that secures him the possession of his own. For wrong-doing of whatever kind she should not be made to suffer a severer punishment than is inflicted upon a man. The world will continue to be unjust to her until public opinion makes the impure man as odious as it makes the impure woman.

The best interests of mankind, of the Church and the State, will be served by widening and strengthening woman's influence. The ancient civilization perished because woman was degraded, and ours will be perpetuated by a pure, believing, self-reverent and enlightened womanhood. Woman here in the United States is more religious, more moral, and more intelligent than man; more intelligent in the sense of greater openness to ideas, greater flexibility of mind, and a wider acquaintance with literature; and what we need for good for her must be good for our religion and civilization. She "stays all the fair young planet in her hands."

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Let us now return to the reasons given by Father Madrid to lead Catholics to frequent Communion; the twelfth of these motives is the following:

If we regard the excellent fruits obtained by the worthy reception of this Sacrament, can there be found a person animated in the least by the spirit of Christ who would not wish to be nourished by it, not only frequently, but very frequently? Divine are of the opinion that from the worthy reception, that is, from the reception of this Sacrament in a state of grace, twelve fruits are produced in the soul of the faithful, similar to those of the tree of life of which St. John speaks in the last chapter of the Apocalypse, where He says: "He showed me a river of the water of life clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb in the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river was the tree of life bearing twelve fruits yielding its fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Richard of St. Victor is of opinion that we may call all these fruits, which according to the interpretation of other Doctors may be epitomized as follows: The first and primary is a rivifying fruit, preparing and increasing the life of the soul; then a refreshing fruit, or an encouragement to bear easily and with fortitude the labors and burdens inseparable from the present life, according to the sentence: "Come to me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Matt. xi. 28); another fruit increases charity in our hearts; another, meekness; another, which we might call the panacea, cures all our infirmities; another creates an habitual union of the soul with God, so frequently met with in the lives of the saints; finally, another has in itself the sweetness of every taste.

St. Bernard has the following passage in regard to this same subject: "The Eucharist is medicine to the sick, viaticum to the pilgrim; it strengthens the weak and delights the healthy; and strong; it causes man to accept correction with meekness; it increases patience in labor, love in charity, promptitude in obedience, vigilance in dangers, devotion in prayer. Whoever abstains from Communion deprives himself of all these gifts."

The thirteenth reason is: He who frequently approaches Communion, frequently also examines his conscience, and as a consequence deplores his faults and resolves to correct them; all these acts of great merit are omitted by him who abstains from Communion, although he may keep himself in the state of grace.

The fourteenth reason is connected with the preceding, for he who frequently approaches Communion, frequently approaches the tribunal of penance, and whoever frequently receives the sacrament of penance takes care of his soul better and more easily, and endeavors to keep his heart free from all stains of sin, not only because of the shame one feels of accusing himself repeatedly of the grace of the sacrament which invigorates the will to overcome temptations; and therefore, again, the frequentation of these sacraments enabling man to preserve the state of grace is incomparably preferable to abstinence from them.

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