

## WOMAN'S POSITION IN PAGAN TIMES.

BY PROF. H. H. BOYESEN.

I HAD heard so many times, both in and out of the pulpit, that woman owed to Christianity her social elevation and the amelioration of her lot, that I had come to accept it as a truism. At all events, it had never occurred to me to question the postulate until, one day, I read in the "Germania" of Tacitus that among the ancient Teutons a kind of sanctity seemed to pertain to women. Truly remarkable, considering the time when it was written, is the statement that the German women were not permitted to regard themselves as standing outside the world belonging to the men, nor were they unconcerned in their warlike pursuits. If the above statement of Tacitus is to be trusted, I am inclined to believe that the Germans, amid all the rudeness of a pastoral and militant life, possessed elements of a higher civilization than did the fastidious and over-refined Romans. The chief evidence of this superiority is, I think, to be found in their attitude towards women. Among the ancient Germans, apparently, men conceded all that women demanded. There is to me something very noble in the comradeship of husband and wife which appears to have existed among these rude and hardy warriors,—a comradeship half resembling that of boy and girl before the consciousness of sex has markedly differentiated them. Not even from the tribal council were women excluded. Tacitus expressly states that they were attentively listened to, and that their advice was never left unheeded.

Paganism in the North did, undoubtedly, tend to evolve sturdier types of womanhood than Christianity has done; and it accorded a recognition to female intelligence which Christianity has been far slower in according. I cannot but think that the Oriental view of womanhood, implied in the Bible, has had an enormous influence in forcibly checking the normal development. The Catholic church not only adopted, but immensely exaggerated the disabilities under which the sex had labored in Semitic lands; and the result was that the free-born, sagacious, and nobly self-dependent daughter of the Teutonic forests was dwarfed, subdued, and spiritually crippled until she became the commonplace, insignificant, obedient *Hausfrau* of to-day.

It would be an exaggeration, perhaps, to maintain that Christianity is alone responsible for this undoubted degeneration of womanhood, as regards civic worth, weight of personality, and strength of character; but that it has been the strongest of a number of co-operating factors is beyond dispute. Social refinement, increased security of life,—in a word, civilization, with its changed ideas,—is responsible for the rest. And the two are so closely intertangled that it is impossible to say where the one begins and the other ends. It is customary to comprehend under the term "chivalry" that radical change of sentiment which about the