

OUR WOMEN.

WHEN the question of the "Rights of Woman" took form and substance, as it were, thirty odd years ago, the limitations of the sex were far greater than we find them to-day. It was not a sudden outbreak and protest of a few, but the expression of a general discontent at a state of things that left woman, her person, property, and children, so dependent upon the will of the husband and father, that she felt herself more a bond-woman than wife. At that time a divorce between the parties was comparatively rare, and was always regarded as a reproach. The sense of duty inherent in the people made the relations of the marriage contract pre-eminently sacred, and anything likely to weaken this sense of consecration was looked upon with special disfavor; hence the bitter antagonism and cruel abuse at first heaped upon the advocates of this reform, who were accused of favoring many and grievous immoralities utterly foreign to their character. A generation or more has passed away, or, rather, has arisen, and the public better understands the nature of the movement.

At that time, I, like others, jumped at the conclusion that the ballot-box was our only remedy. I gave from Maine to Kentucky, with purely literary lectures, one on this subject, entitled "The Dignity of Labor," in which I showed up the prevailing disabilities of the sex, and argued that suffrage alone seemed the true remedy. I still think so, though the progress of events has so far modified these disabilities that women may now do pretty much as they please, whether married or single. There is now little talk about sphere, and the definition I then gave, so long ago, *The measure of capacity is the measure of sphere to either man or woman*, is generally accepted.

We are now doctors and lawyers and merchants and artistes of every kind, and our doings attract little or no attention, unless they become enormously wicked, and the world has grown so tolerant that

scarcely can a woman find a jury to condemn her, even when she resorts to pistol, dirk, or poison. This is a great change wrought in the last thirty-five years, a part of which must be referred to the woman movement, and a part to the onwardness of thought and action in accordance with an influx of foreign thinkers and theorizers, our own ever-questioning activity as a people, and the greater latitude of the sex in matters of opinion. I think as a people we are morally worse than we were thirty-five years ago. Whether we women are at the bottom of this retrograde phase may be a subject of question.

At any rate, a multitude of women have reached that stage of development that they will no longer be subordinated. They insist upon the rights of citizenship in the masculine sense of franchise. Wives, widows, and spinsters of every shade and condition claim the privileges pertaining to the republic, and it is useless to gainsay them. I had hoped that the sex would infuse a nobler and purer element into politics, but our women politicians are about the same as our brothers, plotting and planning for success, leaving to time to make things straight or otherwise.

This question of suffrage does not by any means stand alone. Once all the women went to church of a Sunday, bringing out their pretty brood with maternal pride: now they fearlessly question the dogmas of the Church, send the children to the Sunday-school or not, and lounge out the day at home. This church-going in the past certainly was a great element in the orderly methods of a family. All classes looked forward to it with interest—washed for it, dressed for it, and behaved for it. It was a day of cleanliness and decorum not entirely expended during the following week. It is true we women were and are very much under the sway of the priest, but gradually the black coat and white cravat have disappeared, and with them the awe

they inspired. Women now preach and expound the Scriptures, and in casting themselves adrift from old dogmas, have let family responsibilities drift away with them.

This is not altogether their fault, for the pulpit has ceased to be the guide it once was, and is somewhat dazed at the doings and demands of the sex. Ministers are so much less coddled and petted by the full-fleeced lambs of their flock that they are hardly able to take in the situation; they see the difference, but what are they to do? The women will not abide St. Paul's injunction that they should hold their tongue, and in all doubtful points "if they will learn anything, ask of their husbands at home," for he, poor man, may know less than themselves, and may not be willing to honestly utter "I do not know." It is certain that a wide-spread skepticism pervades the minds of women, and the pastor must not presume too much upon the ignorance or tolerance of his hearers.

Yet women are frequently told from the pulpit that they owe all that pertains to their present happiness and culture to the Christian religion, as if up to the advent of the Christ the woman was in the very bitterness of thralldom, under a hard master not yet emerged from savageness, all labor and all burdens consigned to her back, while man stretched his lordly limbs in the chase, or in the panoply of the battle-field. Whereas a very high degree of culture prevailed among some pagan nations before the inception of Christianity, and they had their prophets and founders of religion based upon pure morals and abstract ideas, and though the tendency of Oriental civilization was to isolate and seclude woman, she had a high degree of freedom, and women of superior capacity had availed themselves of it, and were eminent in many ways. The women of Homer are graceful, versatile, and possess a full share of the freedom of the age.

Indeed, the women of antiquity by no means filled subordinate positions. They ruled empires, they listened to philosoph-

ic teachings, held offices in the temples of the gods, and the vestals were treated with more than royal honors. Semiramis, Aspatia, Cleopatra, Hypatia, Zenobia, women of marked individualism, were all pagans, and overcame any disabilities that may be inherent in sex. Woman, like man, owes to the teachings of Christ a higher standard of morals, binding alike upon both, and this higher basis for action which the Christian woman has over her pagan sister is the heaven which is the hope of the world.

The Jewish woman from the first had been an accepted power in the nation. She was prophet, judge, and a burning patriot, using all the resources of a subtle mind and remorseless heart to promote the glory of her people. I do not perceive that Christianity did more for the pagan or Jewish woman than for the pagan or Jewish man. It was a feature of the age, which, in a singular manner, held its way, distinct, unbroken, down to our own day.

The advent of Christianity was in the midst of a vast number of intelligent women, Jewish, Persian, Greek, Egyptian, forming a part of great nationalities, congregated in cities and studying in seats of learning, who doubtless accepted the new teaching because of the immaculate purity, the inspired manliness, the infinite tenderness of the Divine Teacher. Women embraced the doctrines as with a heavenly insight, and found them to impart a sublime self-abnegation, a hope, a faith unshakable, by which they encountered persecution and death with heroic constancy. They were no more exempt from suffering than the other sex. *The equality of woman was acknowledged by her equality of persecution.*

Externally, her situation would seem to be worse than under pagan supremacy. She was torn to pieces by wild beasts in the Colosseum; she was broken upon the wheel, and stretched upon the rack. The Catacombs of Rome still bear testimony to her steadfastness. Her status was not in the eyes of the world in advance. She had awakened from Epi-

curean luxury to an everlasting hope, realized through a pathway of torture. The pagan priestess now became the Christian saint; the pagan vestal became the Christian nun. Then came the irruption of the barbarians from the north, bringing with them their grim equality of sex, and faith in, and reverence for, their Aruna, or inspired women, mixing the races with a new but majestic paganism, and infusing great elements of aspiration and power.

In all this woman's head was not anointed with a more benign chrisim than that poured upon the head of her brother. She was part and parcel of the sublime ministration of pain which is the perpetual baptism of great ideas. She was an equal factor in the development of the race: sharing in the suffering, and benighted by the errors and superstitions of the age. Chivalry placed her queen of grace and beauty, to which we owe much of the respect which should never be lost to the sex. In the slow rise of commerce and literature we find the saints Elizabeth, Theresa, and other women of sanctity and intelligence, but much, very much, under the sway of the priest. Man is mostly a soldier, and the woman of capacity takes the field with him, or holds the feudal castle against aggressive barons. She is a Joan of Arc, a Countess of Mountfort, or a Queen Philippi. In all she is level with the times.

The Reformation under Martin Luther threw the sex rather in the background, and the Protestant woman binds her brow anew with the crown of thorns. The new ideas make their way through streams of human blood poured forth by men and women alike. The latter sinks into the background. She can no longer be nun or abbess. She might die a martyr, but she will not be a canonized saint. The Roman Catholic Church utilized her best sensibilities, and turned her natural ambition into sacred channels. Not so with Protestantism. The Church afforded her no field as an appendage to man. She witnessed and shared in the sacrifices of the sect to which she be-

longed, and was driven perforce to study the dogmas to which she subscribed. Hence in a polemical community it was natural that a woman like Anna Hutchinson should become the first in this country to lead her sex into the intricate field of independent thinking, and the right of a woman to sit in judgment upon pulpit as well as other oracles. From that time to this the sex has been slowly but surely asserting themselves. They have broken out here and there, as in the case of Ann Lee, the founder of Shakerism. Rather apt to lend themselves to masculine leaders, greatly to their own detriment, they have been—the majorities of them—conservative in all their actualities. Margaret Fuller, never entirely clear in her views, had an extensive following because of what she suggested. The large numbers of women who have been for a century or more engaged in literary pursuits have contributed largely to the wave that has in our time rolled onward and borne upon its surface this turbulence culminating in the claim to suffrage by the sex.

Now, whether women will at length secure this manly privilege is a matter of little comparative moment. As half of our common humanity, half of the national odium, because of our moral obliquities, must rest upon her, and she must either reject marriage altogether, or, better, redeem the obligations of wife and mother.

That both sexes are growing disinclined to marriage is beyond question. That the woman of the past, subordinate, and looking to marriage as the primary resource, is obliterated, has ceased to be, is also beyond question. At present, her attitude to the other sex is aggressive and defiant. The priest is losing his power over her. She is not ashamed of her age; she is not at all troubled at being called an old maid; she does not shrink from hard work; she may seem to be a little grim, for she eschews all vanity—that vice which has almost the grace of a virtue in the make-up of an agreeable woman.

What kind of a woman the future may evolve is hard to determine; but that man will be compelled to divide actualities with her is certain. She will compete with him, and he will be compelled to accept her in fields hitherto uninhabited by her. It may be that our Portias for a while may have too much of subtle craft for the broader philosophy of jurisprudence, but when their numbers shall increase, I apprehend the poor lawyers will strike an average with the other sex.

In our competitions it is certain that the prestige of femininity will disappear; many a grace, many a sweetness and charm will evaporate; but if these will be superseded by nobler traits, by justice, integrity, and a conscientious sense of the duties that pertain to life in all its manifestations, I apprehend the man, still developing into higher and better views, will not find himself deserted by the differentiated woman hereafter to arise.

ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

TRANSFIGURED.

ALMOST afraid they led her in
(A dwarf more piteous none could find),
Withered as some weird leaf, and thin—
The woman was—and wan and blind.

Into his mirror with a smile—
Not vain to be so fair, but glad
The south-born painter looked the while,
With eyes than Christ's alone less sad.

"Mother of God," in pale surprise,
He whispered, "what am I to paint?"
A voice, that sounded from the skies,
Said to him: "Raphael, a saint."

She sat before him in the sun.
He scarce could look at her, and she
Was still and silent . . . "It is done,"
He said. "Oh, call the world to see!"

Ah, this was she in veriest truth—
Transcendent face and haloed hair:
The beauty of divinest youth,
Divinely beautiful, was there.

Herself into her picture passed—
Herself, and not her poor disguise,
Made up of time and dust. . . . At last
One saw her with the Master's eyes.

MRS. S. M. B. PIATT.

ONE MOTHER'S MEDITATIONS.

THE ways and customs of the young of to-day are so different from what they were twenty years ago, that involuntarily we sigh for the good old days when maidenly modesty was a greater recommendation for a young lady than banged hair and pannier skirts, and when the highest ambition of the masculine mind was to prove himself worthy of the good mother who bore him, instead of indulging in all the fashionable vices so common with the young men of to-day. To-night, as I sit by my fireside, and rock my little one to sleep, I wonder what future years will bring to him. Will my boy develop into an intellectual and noble man? Will every good thought and pure desire and noble aspiration that animated my own youthful bosom, and made me ambitious to carve out for myself a happy and use-

ful future, be transmitted from mother to son, and bring forth an hundredfold of fruit? May I live with the blessed hope that *my* boy will not forget his mother's early training, but that I may see fulfilled in him my highest conceptions of a perfect man! I want to make him a man of principle and honor, one who will never stoop to do a mean act because the world would never know it. I want him to be so much above the common herd of humanity that he will fear no greater punishment for a misdeed than his own reproving conscience, and expect no higher commendation for well-doing than a consciousness of having done his duty.

But will it be *possible* for him to live and move in a world so corrupted and polluted with sin and vice, and not be-