

## WOMAN : WHAT IS HER APPOINTED POSITION AND WORK ?



HIS question is increasingly important in these days of controversy; and can only be answered with safety and assurance by referring to woman's Maker and Master.

In Genesis i. 27—30, we read that God made man male and female, after one Divine likeness, and to the end that they should people the earth, and rule and govern the created kingdom of animal and vegetable life around them.

Genesis ii. gives us, in an independent account, the manner of man's creation in detail, together with God's reasons for the creation of woman, viz., that He, seeing man's solitude, and that it was not good for him to be alone (verse 18), proposed to give him a companion and help, even as He had given to all His other creatures, and to this end He made woman.

Thus, in the giving by God, and the reception by Adam (verses 22, 23), we see that woman was given as a help and supplement to man, he having been made independently, and without reference to her; she having been made out of man, and especially for his benefit. That the serpent should have exercised his power of temptation on her, rather than on Adam, is hardly sufficient evidence that she was morally weaker than he. There is plausibility in the inference that the serpent, knowing that her influence over him was greater than his over her, employed the means more likely to secure his end; and the result goes to strengthen this supposition.

By the exercise of her power over man, woman brought on herself a punishment which seems to have altered their relative positions to each other. Her will, henceforth, was to be subject to his; he was to rule over her (Genesis iii. 16), while on him fell a punishment independent of her, but which reduced him to her level in punishment.\*

Hence "woman's appointed position" is now one of subjection. But even as God in mercy softened the curse pronounced on Adam, by making work one of man's greatest blessings; so did He temper this loss of social position to woman by granting, instead, those qualities of love, honour, and confidence felt between the strong and the weak, the protector and the protected, which could never have existed where equality reigned. Any attempt to break down or infringe the barrier to equality would be destructive of the social harmony which God has instituted, and which is a serious and important element in human happiness.†

\* No reference is here made to equality so-called. Equality implies uniformity in measure, strength, degree, proportion, whether in respect of physical, mental, or moral attributes; consequently cannot with any justice be applied to man and woman. God in no wise reproduced man in His formation of woman; their points of difference are distinct, and render them fit for the special and separate spheres in which they are placed.

† It is interesting to notice the marked distinction of position which David assigns them, when expressing his desires before God for his children (Psalm cxliv. 12), "That our sons may grow up as the young plants, and that our daughters may be as the polished corners of the temple." The one, as it were, strong and beautiful, hardened to brave the winds and storms of life; the other, cultivated and ornamented with every grace of character that should fit them for a position of quiet service in the Master's house.

Notwithstanding her loss of position, however, God has given to woman a striking prominence in Scripture, and in connection with some of His most eminent servants.

Moses, the future deliverer of Israel, the great lawgiver, the type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the representative of God Himself (Ex. iv. 16), seems to have been left exclusively to woman during all his early training. His mother hid him, and so saved his life from Pharaoh's cruel decree (Ex. i. 22, and ii. 3—10). His sister watched over him until he was found and appropriated by Pharaoh's daughter. She again placed him in his mother's hands till he was old enough to return and live with her, which he did, "as a son," until the cry of his own people snapped the connection between them.

That God should thus have entrusted the training and education of the leader and ruler of His chosen people so entirely to woman is worthy of note.

Miriam's position is at once conspicuous in connection with her brothers. She was a prophetess (Ex. xv. 20), and at the time of Moses' song of praise to God for the deliverance of the children of Israel through the Red Sea, she leads off her band of sister minstrels with her timbrel, and swells the triumph song.

Again, when in her indignation at Moses' marriage with the Ethiopian woman, she joins Aaron in sedition against him (Numb. xii.), God addresses her, equally with her brothers, and, as though her musical influence had placed her in the forefront of the rebellion, He lets fall on her, with terrible mark and severity, the punishment of leprosy;\* and the whole camp of the Israelites was stayed in its journeyings, until she was restored to her position in connection with it (Num. xii. 15). Of this, her sin, and God's dealing with her on account of it, Moses reminds his people when delivering them the laws and observances by which they were to be governed (Deut. xxiv. 9), "Remember what the Lord thy God did unto Miriam by the way after that ye were come forth out of Egypt."

Not that she forfeited her position by this sin as co-leader, with Moses and Aaron, of God's people, for nearly eight hundred years afterwards God mentions her by name, as thus appointed by Himself (Mic. vi. 4): "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam."

Twice, and that in troublous times, did God appoint women as the special medium between Himself and His people. Deborah, the prophetess (Judg. iv. 4), without whom Barak refused to venture into battle, and Huldah, also a prophetess, aunt of Jeremiah, of whom king, priest, and people sought wisdom and judgment (2 Kings xxii. 14) and were guided by her counsel as by God.

Here, too, we would notice (though the acts are of a very different class, still evidencing woman's prominence in Scripture history), that Sisera, with his nine hundred chariots, and men in proportion, was sold into the hands of a woman (Judg. iv. 9), and that Abimelech was killed by part of a millstone cast at him by a woman (Judg. ix. 54).

Joshua's spies were saved by Rahab, who, by this act, was also the means of saving all her family, and she herself was afterwards admitted into the genealogy of our Saviour (Matt. i. 5).

It would seem as if the sons of Zeruiah gained their notoriety (though perhaps of no praiseworthy character) from their relationship to her, as their father is never once mentioned, while they, as "her sons," are spoken of eight times (2 Sam. ii. 18).

David, when pleading for a personal blessing, and assuring his standing in God's sight, on two occasions (Ps. lxxvi. 16, and cxvi. 16)

\* On Aaron was inflicted the punishment of being officially obliged to condemn and exclude her.

urges the memory of his mother as a plea for a gracious hearing.

Our Lord's use of woman as the link between His Godhood and His Manhood, and again, that He should use her as typical of His Church, gives singular honour to her "position," for though always the weaker part of the world, she is the loved, honoured, and cherished of her Saviour and her Lord (Cant. Ep. ii. 22; Rev. xii. 1, xix. 7, xxi. 9).

As to woman's "appointed work," it is essentially one of ministry, and intended so to be; if again we take evidence from Scripture, for she is made "help-meet" for man (Gen. ii. 18), without exception as to position, without limitation as to requirement. But, out of this ministry there evolves a power so subtle that it can only be expressed by the word Influence. Its working is secret, therefore the more assured as friend or foe; and though the heritage of every human being, it is specially the responsibility of woman. About her it evolves like a halo or radius, invisible to the eye, but sensible to the moral and spiritual nature, differing in proportion to the strength and beauty of the character whence it emanates. It is a moral incense, which purifies or poisons the air we breathe. Too often abused, too often unrecognised; but, for good or for evil, herein lies woman's power, and for proof we once more refer to Scripture. It was Eve who caused Adam to sin (Gen. iii.). It was Rebecca's influence which shaped and controlled some of the most important passages in Jacob's early career (Gen. xxvii.). Samson's gloried strength was reduced to utter weakness by a woman (Judg. xvi. 19). Jezebel's influence for evil is recorded not only in history (1 Kings xviii. 4; 2 Kings ix. 7), but it is again mentioned in Rev. ii. 20 (though doubtless as representative of a class, where the Church of Thyatira is condemned for yielding to it. The "little captive maid" (2 Kings v. 2, 3) exercised no mean influence over her master. And Ruth, though a heathen, won for herself a position in Christ's ancestry by her gentle yet powerful influence over Naomi and Boaz.

In the histories of Elijah and Elisha woman stands conspicuous. Two of their most striking miracles were wrought in connection with her (1 Kings xvii., and 2 Kings iv.). Indeed, the "great woman" of Shunam seems to have exerted an influence over Elisha which he could not resist.

Of Ahaziah's reign it is recorded (2 Chron. xxii. 3), "He walked in the ways of the House of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly."

Ahasuerus, while reigning over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, bowed to the influence of Esther, the young Jewess, and consented to withdraw the decree which had gone out into every province in his name, and under his seal (Esther viii.).

Solomon, the wisest of men, and powerful as wise, fell beneath woman's influence. Nehemiah says (chap. xiii. 26), "Among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and He made him king over all Israel, yet even him did outlandish women cause to sin." Indeed, if we may judge from his scorching words of warning to others (Prov. ii. 19, and vii. 26, 27), he must have had a terrible experience of their influence, notwithstanding the beautiful portrait he gives of woman (and which we would fain hope is not only theoretical) in Prov. xxxi. It is a curious and interesting question, too, why woman should have been chosen to represent wickedness, in Zech. v. 7 and 8, unless in recognition of the influence which gives her power. Doubtless she is the emblem of the Church, Jewish as well as Christian; the wife, faithful or unfaithful, in Old as well as New Testament.

While reviewing the women of the Old

Testament, one is constantly reminded that the God-man had not yet been revealed, consequently that His precepts and example must not be looked for.

In the New Testament woman appears under a gentler aspect, but her position and her work are far more conspicuous, inasmuch as Christ has raised her to a higher position than she occupied before, and markedly so in connection with Himself and His disciples, to whom she ministered largely during their sojourn upon earth.

In all Christ's dealings with woman (and they were many) He exhibits a striking tenderness and respect for her; and that He sought her society and ministrations, we may infer by the love He bore for Martha and Mary, and the frequency of His visits to their home (John xi. 5). Witness, too, His dealing with that penitent but loving woman (Luke vii. 38), as she kisses His feet, wetting them with her tears and wiping them again with her hair. Does He spurn her? Nay, He checks her not. Neither does He allow the scorn of those who would, but, on the contrary, He immortalises her and her loving actions there and then by holding them up in admiring contrast to the neglect of the master of the house, who had shown Him no act of devotion. St. Luke (chap. viii. 1-3) says, that as He went from city to village preaching, Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and many women went with Him, ministering unto Him of their substance. St. Matthew (xxvii. 55) says that many women followed Him from Galilee to His crucifixion, ministering to Him.

Now we must remember that, to have followed and remained with Christ at the cross, showed no small amount of courage as well as love; for the cross was then a thing of shame and degradation, equal only to our gallows. Yet, mark you, while there is no mention of one man, four women are specified by name as having been present (John xix. 25 and Mark xv. 40). Is there no significance in the fact of thus immortalising her presence there?

Some of Christ's last thoughts, too, seem to have been given to her. There is no mention of His having spoken on His way to His crucifixion, save to comfort the women of that "great multitude of the people who followed Him."

Turning to them, He said (Luke xxiii. 28), "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Almost His last words were spoken in anxiety for His mother (John xix. 26, 27).

Woman was the first at our Lord's grave, she was also the first to see Him, and the first to whom He spoke after His resurrection (Matthew xxviii. 9; John xx. 16), and she was with Him at His ascension (Acts i. 14). Christ willed that the widow's two mites should preach to the world of self-denial and true charity (Mark xii. 41). Of the woman with whom Jesus sat and talked at the well (John iv. 39) it is written, "That many Samaritans believed on Him for the saying of the woman."

Dorcas' influence still works among the women of to-day (Acts ix. 39).

St. Paul acknowledges Lydia's influence on himself and his companions (Acts xvi. 15), and his epistle to the Romans conveys warm salutations from him to many women, specified by name (chap. xvi.), who seem to have been most active and self-denying helpers in good works. He also, in Phil. iv. 3, specially commends for help "those women who laboured with him."

Again, he reminds Timothy of the "unfeigned faith in his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois" (2 Tim. i. 5), as though his own (Timothy's) faith was, in some degree, influenced by theirs.

The Jews must need send "to the devout and honourable women" to help them when they wanted to expel Paul and Barnabas from the city (Acts xiii. 50). The prophesying of the evangelist Philip's four daughters (Acts xxi. 9), and of Anna, in the Temple (Luke ii. 36), gives women an authorised position as teachers before the whole world.

St. Peter, in recognising Influence as woman's "work" (1 Peter iii. 2), points at one of the most important channels through which that influence flows. The words, "chaste conversation," are in the margin rendered "pure conduct," which implies not only the words used, but the manner, the looks, the indefinable something by which all around her are either raised or lowered in tone of feeling. St. Paul alludes to this influence again as soul-saving (1 Cor. vii. 16). St. John's second epistle witnesses to the position and influence of the "Elect lady and her sister." Once more; is it not noteworthy that woman is the figure which our Lord Himself employs when representing the subtle power that shall leave the whole of Christendom? (Matt. xiii. 33.) And yet again, that His Church (Rev. xii. 1) and an apostate church (Rev. xvii. 3), of whose influence on the history of the world none shall predicate, is each symbolised by woman?

There surely is some lesson to be drawn from this study of "woman's position and work," as appointed by God and approved by Christ, that may help us in this nineteenth century.

The claims—not to say demands—that she is making for herself, as to position and work, are hardly questionable as to their results. The woman of the future will not, it is to be feared, be such as won the reverence and love of Christ; she will not be willing to be the "help-meat" for man. Man needs help in matters where he is deficient; she is fitting herself to clash with him in matters where he is sufficient.

I would not for one moment cast a shadow of slight on the advance in woman's education. The best of us have long felt that some move, commensurate with the times, was necessary; but has not the move been in the wrong direction, or, at all events, of too violent a character? And ought we not hopefully to anticipate that time, when wisdom shall suggest some happier mean than has yet been attained?

Granted that woman needed a higher and fuller education—is she in the right road to attain it by following her present prescribed course? Is she not in danger of cultivating her head to the neglect—nay, injury—of her heart? Is she not giving the best years of her probation life to the study of subjects that will be useless to her if she is to continue in her true woman's sphere? If she is aiming beyond that sphere (I will not say above it), where will she find herself? Not on a level with man, either physically or intellectually; she cannot reach it, but in an intermediate position, having lost her own individuality and special charms, and not gained anything instead worthy her endeavours. Who, again, is to take woman's place if she forsake it? Must we plead for a new creation?

Nay! We would see a stronger, truer, lovelier woman, but not a weaker, poorer man.

It is the something different in woman which makes man look to her for help, and feel that he can get it, too, nor is he one whit humiliated by the fact. It is a law of nature, moral and spiritual, as well as physical, that everything is in itself beautified and strengthened by its contrast. It is the heart in woman that counsels man's head, her weakness, yet endurance, that stimulates his energy, her tenderness, and unselfish love which gives him firmness and strength.

And are these qualities worthless? Are they not rather priceless jewels which nothing short of madness would barter for tinsel which will never stand proof? Let us beware how we lose what is ours by right and gain nothing in its stead. The "position and work" that Scripture has assigned to woman is far higher and nobler than any that she is idly conceiving for herself now in this nineteenth century.

In identifying Influence as woman's work, let it not be inferred that the aim has been to show that her influence is always on the side of right. The examples cited prove otherwise, but only to establish the fact that influence is her special talent, for which she will have to render account; therefore, her strong point to keep and cultivate.

Of her comparative powers of mind with man, nothing need be argued; it is irrelevant to the question before us, and has been sufficiently discussed (though without satisfaction) in other places; but I would refer to the spirit of a remark which floats in my memory (though I cannot identify it with anyone), to the effect that the minds of man and woman stand in relation to each other as does the sovereign and its worth in small coin. The one the "multum in parvo" in worth, but unable to deal with the minor details of life. The other, equal in value, though differing in form, with a ready adaptability to meet all emergencies at all times, and useful where its other self can find no place. In short, while strength is the attribute of one, refinement of touch, quickness of perception, gentleness, and endurance in action, are the special attributes of the other.

Let each fill their separate sphere of usefulness, and there need be no detractor of worth on either part; but interfere, or trench one on the other's ground, and we have the result in a feminine man, or a masculine woman; either, or both, of which is an aversion to both sexes. What would man do in the sick-room, or woman on the Exchange?

To return to our point. If influence is woman's "work," she is placed on a pinnacle of power and usefulness, but only as long as it is in subjection to her Maker and Master.

Should we not, then, strive to realise each one to herself what it is to hold in possession a power for good or evil in relation to others? A power that never sleeps, though we be unconscious of its presence; a power that, go where we will, must leave a track behind it, either of light or shadow; a power that might save a soul from death; yea, a power which, in its results, will affect our own position hereafter. Should we not hold such a power with trembling watchfulness, and consecrate it to the service and glory of Him who gave it, seeking the indwelling and abiding presence of His Holy Spirit to keep us ever on our watch-towers, that "As we have opportunity, we may do good unto all men?"

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