

RELATIVE CONDITION OF WOMAN UNDER PAGAN  
AND CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION.

I.

THE family is the source of society; the wife is the source of the family. If the fountain is not pure, the stream is sure to be foul and muddy. Social life is the reflex of family life.

The history of woman in Pagan countries has been, with rare exceptions, an unbroken record of bondage, oppression, and moral degradation. She had no rights that the husband felt bound to respect. In many of the ancient empires of Asia, notably in Babylon, India, Thrace and Lydia, the wife was bought, like meat in the shambles, or like slaves in the market-place.<sup>1</sup> Every woman, no matter of what rank, had to submit to be dishonored once in her life by some stranger in the temple of Venus.<sup>2</sup>

Her life was one of abject misery and unrequited toil. Ministering to-day to the capricious passion of her husband, to-morrow she is exposed to all the revulsions of feeling that follow the gratification of animal appetites.<sup>3</sup> "Among the Indians," says Strabo, "wives are purchased from their parents for a price equal to that of two head of cattle. They are treated as mere servants by their husbands, who have the right to scourge them as their caprices may dictate."<sup>4</sup> To speak to any one of the wives of the king of Persia, or even to approach too near her chariot while on a journey, was punished with death. And it is worthy of remark that the same law obtains in that country even to this day.

In Scythia, Tartary, and other countries, the wife who had the misfortune to survive her husband was immolated on his tomb.<sup>5</sup> The same inhuman custom of self-immolation by widows, or *Suttee*, as it was popularly called, prevailed in India, till it was abolished by the English government in 1847. Previously to that period, several ineffectual attempts had been made to put an end to the practice. The Brahmins denounced the humane efforts of the English government as an unwarrantable interference with their religion. We may form some idea of the frequency of these human sacrifices from the fact that, between 1815 and 1826, 7154 cases of *Suttee* were officially reported to have occurred in Bengal alone.

Another scourge of woman was polygamy. By its baneful in-

<sup>1</sup> Herodot., I., No. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Lecky, *Hist. of European Morals*.

<sup>3</sup> Herodotus, B. I.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 199.

<sup>5</sup> L. XV., p. 68.

fluence, her empire over the domestic kingdom was divided, and her conjugal rights were violated. No one can read Herodotus, the Father of History, without being painfully impressed with the loose ideas of marriage prevailing in Asia. Throughout that vast continent polygamy might be said to have been universal. The Zend-Avesta (or law-book of the Persians) prescribed no rule limiting the number of wives for each household. A maiden, remaining unmarried till her eighteenth year, was threatened with the most severe punishment in the life to come.<sup>1</sup> They regarded the strength of the nation as depending more upon the number of children than upon integrity of morals.

The Medes, according to the testimony of Strabo, were compelled by law to have at least seven wives. The Mongols, the Tartars, and the people of the ancient empire of China legally sanctioned community of wives. The same custom prevailed among the Massagetæ, as Herodotus affirms.<sup>2</sup> Polygamy was regarded as honorable among the ancient Huns and Goths. A man's dignity was estimated by the number of his wives. In no country was the domestic life more grossly dishonored than in Great Britain.<sup>3</sup>

Tacitus represents the domestic life of the Germans in a very favorable light. His honest indignation at the moral corruption of his country-women may have prompted him to embellish the sanctity of marriage among the Germans. Of nearly all barbarous nations, he says that they alone were content with one wife, excepting the nobles, who had a retinue of wives, more from a sense of dignity than from luxury. Swift and severe was the punishment meted out to an adulterous wife. Her hair was cut off, and she was lashed naked through the street by her injured husband.<sup>4</sup>

"Among the Gauls," says Strabo, "the occupations of the two sexes are distributed in a manner opposite to that which obtains among us. The cultivation of the land and a life of drudgery were imposed on wives, whilst the husbands devoted their time to war-like pursuits."<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle justly boasts that, in Greece, woman was not degraded to the level of a slave, as in Asia.<sup>6</sup> But it must be added that, if she was not treated as a slave, she was regarded as a minor. She was under a perpetual tutelage, first to her father, who disposed of her for a price; next, to her husband; and, lastly, in her widowhood, to her sons. Even if she had no sons, she was not free; for her husband could appoint a guardian to succeed him after death. The Greek wife lived in almost entire seclusion, she and

<sup>1</sup> Döllinger, *The Gentile and the Jew*, I., p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> *Cæsar, Comment.*, I., v.

<sup>3</sup> *B. IV.*, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> *B. I.*, No. 215.

<sup>5</sup> *German.*, ch. xix.

<sup>6</sup> *Politic.*, I., l. 5.

her husband occupying separate parts of the house. She never went abroad unless accompanied by a female slave; she received no male visitors in the absence of her husband, and she was not permitted even to eat at her own table when male guests were present; she was denied the luxury of a polite education, her instruction being usually confined to the most necessary household duties, and to a limited knowledge of music and dancing, which was afforded her, not for the entertainment of herself and family, but to enable her to take part in certain religious festivals.

The domestic life of Greece, it is true, was founded on monogamy. But whilst the law restricted the husband to one wife as his helpmate and domestic guardian, it tolerated and even sanctioned the *hetairai*, who bore to him the relation of inferior wives, and who enjoyed his society more frequently and received more homage from him than his lawful spouse.<sup>1</sup> And whilst the education of the wife was of a most elementary character, the greatest care was lavished in cultivating the minds of the *hetairai*, that they might entertain their paramour by their wit while they fascinated him by their charms. The wife was the beast of burden; the mistress was the petted and pampered animal. These *hetairai* derived additional importance from being legally chosen to offer sacrifice on certain public occasions. This demoralizing system, so far from being deplored, was actually defended and patronized by statesmen, philosophers, and leaders of public opinion, such as Demosthenes, Pericles, Lysias, Aristotle, and Epicurus.

Solon erects in Athens a temple to Venus, the goddess of impure love. Greece is full of such temples, whilst there is not one erected to chaste, conjugal love.<sup>2</sup> No virtuous woman has ever left a durable record in the history of Greece.

The husband could put away his wife according to his capricious humor, and take a fairer, younger, and richer bride. He could dissolve the marriage bond without other formality than an attestation in writing before the archon; and the wife had practically no power to refuse, as she was completely under the dominion of her husband. She was a mere chattel, marketable at will; nor had she any power to dissolve the marriage without her husband's consent.

Such is the dark but truthful picture of woman exhibited before us in the most polished nation of Pagan antiquity. Now, the sport of man's passions; soon after, she is the victim of his irresponsible hatred. Denied access to her own table in the presence of strangers, she leads a dreary, monotonous life in the society of her slaves. Her very position of wife debars her from a refined edu-

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<sup>1</sup> "The Gentile and the Jew," II., 235 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *Hist. Univer.*, p. 198.

cation, which is sedulously bestowed on the mistress. She is doomed to a life of domestic bondage ; the other enjoys the widest liberty. How can she give her heart to her husband, since she sees his affections divided among usurping rivals? Conjugal love must be reciprocal. She does not reign as queen and mistress of her household, but serves as a tenant at will. Her wishes are not consulted about her marriage or her divorce. Should her husband precede her to the grave, her condition is not improved.

In a word, the most distinguished Greek writers treat woman with undisguised contempt ; they describe her as the source of every evil to man. One of their poets said that marriage brings but two happy days to the husband—the day of his espousals and the day on which he lays his wife in the tomb.

Hesiod calls women “ an accursed brood, and the chief scourge of the human race.” The daily prayer of Socrates was a thanksgiving to the gods that he was born neither a slave nor a woman. And we have only to glance at the domestic life of Turkey to-day to be convinced that woman fares no better under modern Moham-medanism than she did in ancient Greece.

The Mohammedan husband has merely to say to his wife : “ Thou art divorced,” and the bond is dissolved. To his followers Mohammed allowed four wives ; to himself an unlimited number was granted by a special favor of Heaven.

The moral standard of the Lacedæmonian wives was far lower than that of the Athenians. They were taught, when maidens, to engage in exercises that strengthened the body and imparted grace to their movements, but at the sacrifice of female modesty. The idea of conjugal fidelity was not seriously entertained. Adultery was so common that it was scarcely regarded as a crime. Aristotle says that the Spartan wives lived in unbridled licentiousness.<sup>1</sup>

Passing from Greece to Italy, we find that monogamy was, at least nominally, upheld in Rome, especially during the earlier days of the Republic. But, while the wife was summarily punished for the violation of the marriage vows, the husband's marital transgressions were committed with impunity.

Toward the end of the Republic, and during the Empire, the disorders of nuptial life increased to an alarming extent. There was a fearful rebound on the part of Roman wives, particularly among the upper classes, from the restraints of former days to the most unlimited license. They rivalled the wantonness of the sterner sex. So notorious were their morals, in the time of Augustus, that men preferred the unfettered life of celibacy to an alliance with partners bereft of every trace of female virtue. The strict

<sup>1</sup> Apud Döllinger, “ The Gentile and the Jew,” II., 236. Plutarch's Lives, Lycurgus.

form of marriage became almost obsolete, and a laxer one, destitute of religious or civil ceremony, and resting solely on mutual agreement, became general. Each party could dissolve the marriage-bond at will and under the most trifling pretext, and both were free to enter at once into second wedlock.

Marriage was, accordingly, treated with extreme levity. Cicero repudiated his wife Terentia, that he might obtain a coveted dowry with another; and he discarded the latter, because she did not lament the death of his daughter by the former. Cato was divorced from his wife Attilia after she had borne him two children, and he transferred his second wife to his friend Hortensius, after whose death he married her again. Augustus compelled the husband of Livia to abandon her, that she might become his own wife. Sempronius Sophus was divorced from his wife, because she went once to the public games without his knowledge. Paulus Æmilius dismissed his wife, the mother of Scipio, without any reason whatever. Pompey was divorced and remarried a number of times. Sylla repudiated his wife during her illness, when he had her conveyed to another house.<sup>1</sup>

If moral censors, philosophers, and statesmen, such as Cato, Cicero, and Augustus, discarded their wives with so much levity, how lax must have been the marriage-bond among the humble members of society, with examples so pernicious constantly before their eyes!

Wives emulated husbands in the career of divorces. Martial speaks of a woman who had married her tenth husband.<sup>2</sup> Juvenal refers to one who had had eight husbands in five years.<sup>3</sup> St. Jerome declares that there dwelt in Rome a wife who had married her twenty-third husband, she being his twenty-first wife.<sup>4</sup> "There is not a woman left," says Seneca, "who is ashamed of being divorced, now that the most distinguished ladies count their years not by the consuls, but by their husbands."<sup>5</sup>

## II.

The world is governed more by ideals than by ideas; it is influenced more by living, concrete models than by abstract principles of virtue.

The model held up to Christian women is not the Amazon, glorying in her martial deeds and prowess; it is not the Spartan woman, who made female perfection consist in the development of physical strength at the expense of feminine decorum and modesty; it is not the goddess of impure love, like Venus, whose votaries

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch's *Life of Seneca*.

<sup>2</sup> *Sat.*, VI., 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Ep.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Epig.*, VI., 7.

<sup>5</sup> *De Benef.*, III., 14.

regarded beauty of form and personal charms as the highest type of female excellence; nor is it the goddess of imperious will, like Juno. No; the model held up to woman from the very dawn of Christianity is the peerless Mother of our Blessed Redeemer.

She is the pattern of virtue alike to maiden, wife, and mother. She exhibits the virginal modesty becoming the maid, the conjugal fidelity and loyalty of the spouse, and the untiring devotedness of the mother.

The Christian woman is everywhere confronted by her great model. Mary's portrait gazes down upon her from the wall. Her name is repeated in the pages of the book before her. Her eulogy is pronounced from the pulpit. Altars and temples are dedicated in her honor. Festivals are celebrated in her praise. In a word, the Virgin Mother is indelibly stamped on the intellect, the heart, the memory, and the imagination of the Christian daughter.

The influence of Mary, therefore, in the moral elevation of woman can hardly be overestimated. She is the perfect combination of all that is great, and good, and noble in Pagan womanhood, with no alloy of degradation.

Hers is exquisite beauty, but a beauty more of the soul than of the body; it delights without intoxicating. The contemplation of her excites no inward rebellion, as too often happens with Grecian models. She is the mother of fair love devoid of sickly sentimentality or sensuality.

In her we find force of will without pride or imperiousness. We find in her moral strength and heroism without the sacrifice of female grace and honor—a heroism of silent suffering rather than of noisy action. What Spartan mother ever displayed so much fortitude as Mary exhibited at the foot of the cross?

It seems to me that some writers are disposed to lay undue stress on the amiable and tender qualities of Mary and of holy Christian women without dwelling sufficiently on the strong and robust points of their character. The Holy Scripture in one place pronounces a lengthened eulogy on woman. What does the Holy Ghost especially admire in her? Not her sweet and amiable temper or her gentle disposition, though of course she possessed these virtues, for no woman is perfect without them. No; He admires her valor, courage, fortitude, and the sturdy virtue of self-reliance. He does not say: "Who shall find a gentle woman?" but rather: "Who shall find a valiant woman? As things brought from afar and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her."<sup>1</sup> It is only heroic virtues or virtues practised in a heroic degree that the Church canonizes.

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<sup>1</sup> Prov., xxxi.

In every age the Church abounds in women immeasurably surpassing in sturdy virtue the highest types of Pagan female excellence. What woman of ancient Greece or Rome can exhibit evidences of moral strength so sublime as have been manifested in the lives of an Agnes, an Agatha, or a Cecilia, who suffered death rather than tarnish their souls? of a Felicitas and a Symphorosa, who encouraged their sons to endure torments and death rather than renounce their faith, and who shared also in their glorious martyrdom? Pagan history furnishes no instance of motherly devotedness comparable to the strong and tender love of Monica, who traversed land and sea that she might restore her son to a life of virtue.

Every impartial student of history is forced to admit that woman is indebted to the Catholic religion for the elevated station she enjoys to-day in family and social life.

We may recall in what contempt woman was held by the leading minds of Greece. She was kept in perpetual bondage or unending tutelage; she was regarded as the slave and the instrument of man's passions, rather than his equal and companion, by nearly every nation of antiquity; and she is still so regarded in all countries where Christianity does not prevail.

The Catholic Church, following the maxims of the Gospel and of St. Paul, proclaims woman the peer of man in origin and destiny, in redemption by the blood of Christ, and in the participation of His spiritual gifts. "Ye are all," says the Apostle, "the children of God by faith which is in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither servant nor freeman; there is *neither male nor female.*"<sup>1</sup> The meaning is that in the distribution of His gifts God makes no distinction of person or sex. He bestows them equally on bond and free, on male and female. And as woman's origin and destiny are the same as man's, so is her dignity equal to his. As both were redeemed by the same Lord and as both aspire to the same heavenly inheritance, so should they be regarded as of equal rank on earth; as they are partakers of the same spiritual gifts, so should they share alike the blessings and prerogatives of domestic life.

In the mind of the Church, however, equal rights do not imply that both sexes should engage promiscuously in the same pursuits, but rather that each sex should discharge those duties which are adapted to its physical constitution and sanctioned by the canons of society.

To some among the gentler sex the words *equal rights* have been, it is to be feared, synonymous with *similar* rights. It was no

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii., 26-28.

doubt owing to this misapprehension of terms that the attempt was made, not so very long ago, by some of the strong-minded fair, to introduce the glories of the Bloomer costume. But though the attempt proved a failure, the spirit that impelled it still survives, as may be seen by the various masculine modifications that have crept into female dress during the past few years. Where is the flowing and graceful drapery of former days that jealously shielded the modest wearer from gaze on the public street? Is it because the woman of to-day has laid aside what she looks upon as the cumbersome style of her grandmother's time that she aims at dauntlessly presenting herself at the ballot-box to cast in her suffrage for *A* or for *B*? Only a few years ago it provoked laughter to hear that Miss Jemima Snarl was to lecture on "Woman's Rights," or that Dr. Mary Walker had appeared on Broadway in male habiliments *cap-à-pie*. But now it is quite ordinary to hear of ladies, gentlewomen, daughters of some of our country's best men, not, indeed, imitating Dr. Mary Walker's exceptionable attire, but mounting the rostrum to harangue their audiences on the power of the "Faith Healers" or the merits of the "Salvation Army." Is it any wonder that a feeling of sadness creeps over one that such things should be? Fancy a fragile, highly-cultured lady starting up from her drawing-room surroundings at the alarm of fire, rushing to the scene of action, mounting a ladder, axe in hand; or her delicate fingers at play on the engine instead of the light guitar, while her ears are assailed by the coarse language of the motley crowd whose duty or pleasure it is to frequent such places?

To debar woman from such pursuits, is not to degrade her. To restrict her field of action to the gentler avocations of life, is not to fetter her aspirations after the higher and the better. It is, on the contrary, to secure to her not *equal* rights so-called, but those supereminent rights that cannot fail to endow her with a sacred influence in her own proper sphere; for, as soon as woman trenches on the domain of man, she must not be surprised to find that the reverence once accorded her has been in part, or wholly, withdrawn.

But it was by vindicating the unity, the sanctity, and the indissolubility of marriage that the Church has conferred the greatest boon on the female sex. The holiness of the marriage bond is the palladium of woman's dignity, while polygamy and divorce involve her in bondage and degradation.

The Church has ever maintained, in accordance with the teachings of our Saviour, that no man can lawfully have more than one wife, and no woman more than one husband. The rights and obligations of both consorts are correlative. To give to the husband the license of two or more wives would be an injustice to his spouse and destructive of domestic peace. The Church has also



invariably taught that the marriage compact, once validly formed, can be dissolved only by death; for what God hath joined together man cannot put asunder. While admitting that there may be a legitimate cause for separation, she never allows any pretext for the absolute dissolution of the marriage bond. For so strong and violent are the passion of love and its opposite passion of hate, so insidious is the human heart, that once a solitary pretext is admitted for absolute divorce, others are quickly invented, as experience has shown; thus a fearful crevice is made in the moral embankment, and the rush of waters is sure to override every barrier that separates a man from the object of his desires.

It has, again and again, been alleged that this law is too severe, that it is harsh and cruel, and that it condemns to a life of misery two souls who might find happiness if permitted to have their marriage annulled and to be united with more congenial partners. Every law has its occasional inconveniences, and I admit that the law absolutely prohibiting divorce *à vinculo* may sometimes appear rigorous and cruel. But its harshness is mercy itself when compared with the frightful miseries resulting from the toleration of divorce. Its inconvenience is infinitesimal when contrasted with the colossal evils from which it saves society and the solid blessings it secures to countless homes. Those exceptional ill-assorted marriages would become more rare if the public were convinced, once for all, that death alone can dissolve the marriage bond. They would then use more circumspection in the selection of a conjugal partner. Hence it happens that in Catholic countries where faith is strong, as in Ireland and the Tyrol, divorces are almost unheard of.

The enforcement of this law has been maintained by the Church against fearful odds, and has caused her many a mortal struggle. For if the strong government of the United States, with military forces at its command, with the sympathy of public opinion and Christian traditions on its side, is successfully resisted by a colony of Mormons, how violent must have been the opposition to the Church and how hopeless her task, humanly speaking, when physical force and inveterate custom were arrayed against her, and when she had on her side only moral power and spiritual penalties.

In vindicating the sanctity of marriage, the Church had to contend with a triple enemy—the fierce passions of barbarous tribes, the arbitrary power of princes, and the compromising spirit of rebellious churchmen.

From the fifth to the eighth century Europe was periodically visited by warlike tribes from the shores of the Baltic, from Asia, and from Africa. They threatened the overthrow of the Christian religion, and, in the general upheaval of society, the landmarks of

Christian civilization were well-nigh swept away. The invading hosts were utter strangers to monogamy and the restraining maxims of the Gospel. But when the storm subsided, the voice of religion was heard in defence of female honor and the sanctity of marriage, and the triumphant barbarians voluntarily submitted to the yoke of the Gospel.

Virginal and conjugal chastity found still more formidable opponents among many of the petty princes and barons of the Middle Ages. Fortified in their castles and surrounded by submissive vassals, they recognized no power that thwarted their lust; they set the laws of the land at defiance; they intimidated the local clergy; they disregarded even the authority of the bishops. The only voice before which they trembled and which compelled them to surrender their prey, was the anathema of Rome.

What a sorry figure the so-called Reformers presented when the honor of woman was at stake, and what little protection she had to expect from them in the hour of trial! Luther, in his commentary on Genesis, says that he does not decide whether a man is or is not permitted to have several wives at once; yet we all know that he did decide the question by permitting the Landgrave of Hesse to have two wives at the same time, his brother reformer Melancthon concurring in the decision. We know, also, how obsequious Cranmer was to Henry VIII. in sanctioning his divorce from Catherine. How different was the conduct of Pope Innocent III., who compelled the French king, Philip Augustus, to dismiss Agnes de Méranie, whom he had unlawfully married, and take back his lawful wife, Ingelburga of Denmark, whom he had discarded! And all know with what firmness Pius VII., in the present century, refused to dissolve the marriage of Jerome Bonaparte with Elizabeth Patterson.

The Protestant Bishop of Maine makes the following candid avowal: "Laxity of opinion and teaching on the sacredness of the marriage bond and on the question of divorce *originated among the Protestants* of Continental Europe in the sixteenth century. It soon began to appear in the legislation of Protestant States on that Continent, and nearly at the same time to affect the laws of New England. From that time to the present it has proceeded from one degree to another in this country, until, especially in New England and in States most directly affected by New England opinions and usages, the Christian conception of the nature and obligations of the marriage bond finds scarcely any recognition in legislation or in the prevailing sentiment of the community."<sup>1</sup> In confirmation of this statement, it may be remarked that, according to the latest census, there was one divorce to every eight mar-

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from "The Calling of a Christian Woman," by Rev. Morgan Dix.

riages in Ashtabula County, Ohio, which is the focus of the Western Reserve, a colony founded by New England settlers. Had the indissoluble character of the marriage bond not already taken so deep and firm a hold upon the heart and conscience of Europe at the time of the "Reformation," it would have been uprooted by the storm of licentiousness aroused by the teaching and practice of the "Reformers."

What woman can calmly reflect on these facts without blessing the Catholic Church as, under God, the saviour of her sex? If virginal and conjugal chastity is held to-day as the brightest gem in the diadem of woman; if the wife is regarded as the peer of her husband, and not as his slave, the toy of his caprice and passion, as are the wives of Asiatic nations; if she is honored as the mistress of her household, and not looked upon as a tenant at will, as were the wives of Greece and Rome; if she is respected as the queen of the domestic kingdom, to be dethroned only by death, and not treated as the victim of rival queens, like the Mohammedan and Mormon wives, she is indebted to the Church which always held inviolate the unity and indissolubility of marriage, and especially to the Roman Pontiffs who never failed to enforce those fundamental laws.

And if woman has been elevated and ennobled by the Gospel, she has not been ungrateful for the boon conferred; she merits the eternal gratitude of the Christian world for the influence she has zealously exerted and is still exerting in behalf of religion and society. It is fearful to contemplate what would have become of our Christian civilization without the aid of the female sex. Not to speak of the grand army of consecrated virgins who are fanning the flame of faith and charity throughout the world, how many thousands of homes are there in our country from which God withholds His avenging hand, and to which He shows mercy, solely on account of a pious mother or daughter, just as He was willing to show mercy to Sodom for the sake of a few righteous souls, as He restored life to the young man borne to the tomb, for the sake of his mother, the widow of Naim! How many brothers, who had been long since buried in the grave of sin, are brought back to a life of virtue through the intercession of a pious sister, just as Lazarus was raised from the dead by the prayers and tears of Mary and Martha! How many daughters keep alive the spark of religion, which otherwise would be utterly extinguished, in many a household! How many are in their families angels of expiation, atoning by their prayers and mortification for the sins of fathers and sons!

Women, it is true, are debarred from the exercise of the public ministry and the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries, for they are

commanded by the Apostle to "keep silence in the churches."<sup>1</sup> But if they are not apostles by preaching, they are apostles by prayer, by charity, and by good example. If they cannot offer up the Sacrifice of the Mass, they are priests in the broader sense of the term; for they offer up in the sanctuary of their own homes and on the altar of their heart the acceptable sacrifice of supplication, praise, and thanksgiving to God. Viewing, then, woman's dignity and her work in the cause of Christ, well may we apply to her these words of the Prince of the Apostles: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people."<sup>2</sup>

But if we glory in the preëminence that woman has attained under Christian civilization, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that her moral dignity is seriously compromised in many portions of our country by the lax legislation which assails the sanctity of marriage and threatens the very existence of family life. The cancer of divorce is rapidly spreading over the community and poisoning the fountains of the nation; unless the evil is checked by some speedy and heroic remedy, we shall not have much to boast of in comparison with Rome under the Empire, and shall have little left of Christianity except the name. How can we call ourselves a Christian people if we violate the fundamental principle of Christianity? And if the sanctity of marriage does not constitute a cardinal principle of the Christian religion, we are at a loss to know what does.

We cannot view without alarm the enormous increase of divorces legally obtained in this country.

The following figures represent the proportion of divorces to marriages in the six New England States for 1878:<sup>3</sup>

In Massachusetts,	the ratio	was	1	divorce	for every	21	marriages.
In Vermont,	"	"	1	"	"	13	"
In Rhode Island,	"	"	1	"	"	10	"
In New Hampshire,	"	"	1	"	"	10	"
In Connecticut,	"	"	1	"	"	10	"
In Maine,	"	"	1	"	"	8	"

The average proportion, therefore, of divorces to marriages in all the New England States was 1 to 12. Now two important facts have to be borne in mind, which give a still darker coloring to this gloomy picture: 1st, In the aggregate number of marriages, are included those of Catholics, who do not seek divorce, and the members of the Catholic Church may be roughly set down as forming one-fourth of the entire population. This will put the ratio of divorces to marriages at 1 to 8. 2d. The relative increase

<sup>1</sup> I. Cor., xiv. 34.

<sup>2</sup> I. Peter, ii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> These statistics are condensed from Rev. Dr. Dix's admirable work, "The Calling of a Christian Woman."

of divorces over the general increase of the population in those States since 1878 safely warrants the conclusion that, at the present time, there is one divorce for every six marriages outside the Catholic Church.

Let the imagination picture to itself the fearful wrecks daily caused by this rock of scandal, and the number of families that are thus cast homeless on the world. Great stress is justly laid by moralists on the observance of the Sunday, and there are few things more creditable to our country than the quiet that reigns throughout the land on the Christian Sabbath. But what a mockery is this external peace to homes in which domestic peace is destroyed by intestine war, where the mother's heart is broken, the father's spirit is crushed, the family ties are dissolved, and the children cannot cling to one of their parents without exciting the hatred of the other.

This social plague calls for a radical cure; and the remedy can be found only in the abolition of our mischievous legislation regarding divorce, and in an honest application of the teachings of the Gospel.

The tendency to imitate the social depravity of Rome in the worst days of the Empire is not confined to the practice of divorce; it extends also to the neglect of maternal training.

In Pagan Rome, especially under the Cæsars, the wife was frequently divorced not only from her husband, but also from her children. At a tender age they were withdrawn from the care of their natural guardian, and consigned to the custody of slaves, who commonly combined refinement of culture with refinement of immorality. Nothing contributed more than this vicious system to debauch the Roman youth of both sexes.

How many mothers are now to be seen, especially in the higher walks of life, who are so much absorbed by the frivolities and fashions of the times, as to be utterly regardless of the responsibilities of maternity. Reared themselves, perhaps, without order or discipline, the mothers transmit to their children the legacy of anarchy and misrule which they had inherited from their parents. They treat their offspring like pet animals devoid of moral sense; they indulge them in every whim and fancy without inculcating any idea of duty and restraint.

Their great aim is to emancipate themselves as soon as possible from the personal charge of their children, which they regard as an intolerable drudgery, and to pass them over to the hands of strangers. Happily for the children, the nurses and teachers to whom they are consigned are often models of Christian virtue. But this circumstance does not extenuate the mother's delinquency, nor exonerate her from the obligation of personal supervision. A

mother may be aided indeed by other teachers in the education of her children, but never supplanted. The education of the young should begin at the mother's knee. The mind of a child, like softened wax, receives with ease the first impressions, which are always the deepest and most enduring. "A young man according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it."<sup>1</sup> A child is susceptible of instruction much earlier in life than parents generally imagine. Mothers should watch with a jealous eye the first unfolding of the infant mind, and pour into it the seed of heavenly knowledge.

For various reasons the mother should be the first instructor of her children:

1st. As nature ordains that the mother should be the first to feed her offspring with her own substance, so does God ordain that she should be the first to impart to her little ones the "rational milk" whereby they "may grow unto salvation."<sup>2</sup>

2d. Those children that are nurtured by their own mother are usually more healthy and robust than those that are nursed by strangers. In like manner they that are instructed by their own mother in the principles of Christian piety, are usually more robust in faith than those that have been guided exclusively by other teachers.

3d. It cannot be doubted that maternal and filial affections are mutually nurtured by the closer and intimate relations that mother and child have with each other, while these affections are chilled by a prolonged separation.

4th. The more confidence a child has in its preceptor, the more he is apt to advance in learning. Now, in whom does a child confide more implicitly than in his mother? In every danger he flies to her as to an ark of safety; he will place the utmost reliance on what she says. The mother should not lose the golden opportunity of instructing her children in faith and morals while their hearts are open to receive her every word.

5th. Lastly, the mother occupies the same house with her children, frequently the same apartment, and eats at the same table with them. She is the visible guardian-angel of her children. She is therefore the best calculated to instruct them, as she can avail herself of every little circumstance that presents itself to draw from it a moral lesson.

Let Christian mothers recognize their sublime mission. Let them bear in mind that to them is confided the most tender portion of the flock of Christ, which on that account should be watched with the greater care. On them devolves the duty of directing the

<sup>1</sup> Prov., xxii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> I. Peter, ii. 2.

susceptible and pliant minds of their children, and of instilling into their youthful hearts the principle of piety. It is theirs to plant the seed of the word of God in the virgin soil, and, when a more experienced hand is required to cultivate it, the ministers of God will not be wanting in developing its growth.

We would exhort mothers in the name of the holy religion they profess; in the name of their country, which expects them to rear not scourges of society, but honorable and law-abiding members; in the name of God, who requires them to have their offspring fed with the nourishment of sound doctrine; we beg them, in the name of their own eternal salvation and that of the souls committed to their charge, to provide for their children *at home* a healthy, moral, and religious education. "If any one have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."<sup>1</sup>

And, then, what a source of consolation it will be to them in their declining years when they reflect that they will leave after them children who will inherit not only their name, but also their faith and virtues. They will share in the beautiful eulogy pronounced by the Holy Ghost on the mother of the family: "Who shall find a valiant woman? . . . She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue. She hath looked well to the paths of her house, and hath not eaten her bread idle. Her children rose up and called her blessed: her husband, and he praised her. Many daughters have gathered together riches; thou hast surpassed them all. Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain: the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tim., v. 8.

Prov., xxxi.