

1934

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IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

Extension
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5514

1934

U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

WOMAN'S PLACE

by Ervine Inglis

Mother's Day is more uniquely Christian than Christmas or Easter. Other religions have celebrated the birthdays of their saviors, other faiths have their resurrection festivals. But only the Jesus religion celebrates the high position of womanhood.

One needs some intimate study in classical antiquity and non-Christian social life to appreciate this. Widowhood in Hinduism, marriage in Mohammedanism, these are proverbs for the misery of women. The place of women in many of the ancient religions is not describable here. Even among the Greeks, the cultural leaders of all the ancients, the "woman was nature's failure in its endeavor to make men." Plato wanted to reduce this evil to the minimum by making women as man-like as possible. But Aristotle, who was Europe's schoolmaster for a thousand years, thought that way was hopeless. He held that woman was an unfinished man left standing on a lower step in the scale of development; that she is weak of will and therefore incapable of independence or character or position; that she had better be incarcerated behind the quiet walls of a home. He held that "woman would be the last thing civilized by man." But we see now that man is the last thing civilized by woman; for the great civilizing agencies are the family and a settled economic life, both of which are the creations of woman.

Then came Jesus. He never made a reference to woman that was not respectful and sympathetic. Unlike the Old Testament, he never warns men against women. Even the most degraded women found in him an amazing sympathy. So that even Paul was influenced. Now Paul reflected perfectly the orthodox Greek feeling about woman's inferiority. Paul said that in church women ought to keep their heads covered and their lips closed, and that men, if they were wise, would avoid marrying them. It goes without saying that Paul was a bachelor. But even he, strong in his opinions, admitted that in Christ Jesus there just didn't seem to be male and female.

We need not be surprised, then, if that spirit which was in Jesus comes to the surface even in a man-bossed world. Like purifying sun, it rises over the horizon of men's attitude toward women. To the Greek and the Roman the ideal of woman was a Venus. To the Christian the ideal became a Madonna. Cimabue opened the Renaissance by placing upon canvas his famous "Madonna Enthroned." Giotto in the 13th Century makes Mary, the virgin and the mother, the central theme of his art. Fra Angelico knew how to picture a plain peasant girl as the chosen of heaven; and Fra Filippo Lippi whose baby faces looked like Italian Cardinals, yet knew how to paint his high regard for womanhood in the face of a girl-mother. Leonardo might be an engineer and a man of the world, but he left no question about his thought of God's stamp of approval upon beautiful motherhood. Then came Raphael who must have inspired the women of Umbria to holy living that they might be worthy to pose for his many pictures of the mother of Christ.

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And all the while the masters of art were impressing upon the popular mind the exalted place of the mother, the people in ten thousand churches were chanting:

"Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

A religious celebration of Mother's Day is the logical outcome of such an ancient practice. We desire to have a worthy part in such a celebration. But we want to avoid some of the less attractive features that have sometimes marked it. Some of the best of mothers must be looking rather critically at the exhortation that goes to every mother's son of exalt "that wonderful mother of mine". Some discrimination is needed if our praise of motherhood is to mean anything more than an over-sweet sentimentalism. For it is not quite true that all womanhood and all motherhood is of one piece, nor that they are most honored by words that are so indiscriminating as to be meaningless. True womanhood is grateful for a picture that includes both lights and shadows.

First, that we may save the best for the last, let us suggest those points at which woman is most in danger of falling short of her high position. It was Olive Schriener herself who warned her sisters that women are more apt to fall into parasitism than men; that they come too easily to accept luxury as their right; and that they need to guard themselves lest they fall in with upper class pretensions. Dr. Rauschenbusch expresses the same concern when he says "The world is full of eyeless Samsons grinding at the money mills, whipped to a quicker pace by smiling grafters who would not recognize this description of them if they saw it."

Another picture helps us to see woman's great service and the tragedy of her failure. In the days when part of America was a semi-civilized frontier, there were certain new areas such as mining and lumber camps, mushroom towns together with ranch situations where there were no women. Almost invariably alcohol and firearms were accepted and in free use. Then women came. And they did not have to be very high type of women before their influence was felt against guns and liquor. The American woman has had an instinctive fear of these two agencies. They always have made her home unsafe. They have been against her in the up-hill struggle of bringing civilization and culture to her children.

But in these last years a determined group of Americans have gone contrary to their high tradition. They have called upon the nation to supply itself with more guns and with freer alcohol. These women need to study their procedure in the light of our national history. They need to be very sure that this very alcohol will not rise up to get a strangle-hold upon the bodies and the legislatures of their children. And let them beware lest their grandchildren be slain by the sword which their grandmothers advocated.

A third warning may be in place. Women have been drawn into business and industry in great numbers. They need to know that little benefit comes when they throw themselves into direct competition with the skill and craft of men in getting and accumulating wealth and power. Enough men and to spare are already thus engaged so that economic structure is likely to fall and crush us. Where women are in-

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volved in the stormy process of production and trade, let them add human gentleness, not jungle harshness; let their work produce life values rather than dividends and profits. In other fields they have helped civilize men and saved them from destroying themselves through selfishness and violence. Where women spend their days in factory and office and store, we still want them to be women, not just female business men.

But enough of warning. After men have told women to beware lest they make a mistake, they need to be reminded that men had better be willing to take such advice from the women. About the worst vice that we think of in connection with womanhood is regularly passed over with a smile when we think of man's part in the same vice. Only last week a statement from our own state penitentiary indicated that their inmates were 848 men and 8 women. While women are only human, it shows poor sense of value when men dwell too long on their frailties.

We are ready now to consider the place of women in modern living. Let us begin by saying that her place is before the draper's window. Who would criticize women when they look longingly into the show window or the catalog which is filled with pretty things? Most of the beauty in human living comes through women's work and women's taste. It is a part of her responsibility to make her surroundings beautiful and to include herself in the process.

Long ago Coventry Patmore wrote:

No splendor neath the sky's proud dome
But serves for her familiar wear;
The far-fetched diamond finds its home
Flashing and smouldering in her hair;
For her the seas their pearls reveal;
Art and strange lands their pomp supply
With purple, chrome and cochineal,
Ochre and lapis lazuli;
The worm its golden wool presents;
Whatever runs, flies, dives or delves,
All doff for her their ornaments,
Which suit her better than themselves.

No woman has entirely missed her calling when her hands lend themselves to making things clean, attractive, and pretty. Without becoming a slave to such things, let her give thought to making her home a place where nice things are and where good taste reigns. Much of whatever is beautiful in our churches was planned and placed there by women. If anything about town or farm is ugly, its disappearance usually takes place because women believe that ugliness can be done away. No woman should be so busy growing beans that she has no energy left to grow roses. For the task of Womanhood is to see and create things that are beautiful.

Again, the place of women is at the control centers of our civilization. Such centers are the school room, boards and committees that control communities and churches and civic activities. Court rooms and public offices control and maintain an ordered society; women should be there. Welfare groups and reform agencies are needed in every modern community. Newspapers and group recreation are of importance; women should have a part in directing them. It is not enough for women to be isolated centers of sweetness and light. Their spirit and point of view are needed as

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we try to keep from slipping back toward barbarism and as we struggle for improvement.

We take for granted that the multitudes of women who are teachers in the schools are doing great service.

"Blessed are the childless, loving children still;

Theirs shall be a mightier family, even as the stars of heaven."

It is expected too, that women will be among the leaders in the renewed fight to control the traffic in liquor. They are needed also in the attempt to chain the traffic in killing. For men make money through equipping men to kill; and men satisfy their desire to strut as they maintain and lead the companies and batteries and squadrons of men trained for killing. Some women see clearly the absurdity of all this. Here and in numerous other strategic places of power, women are needed to help maintain our civilization.

But most important of all, woman's place is in the home. There she has her best opportunity to do work that is fundamental. Handicapped as she is by the limitations placed upon modern home life, the mother of today is doing great work. Not all are successful, to be sure. Often their failure is all but inevitable because of difficulties which surround them. Yet with all the

"...pangs of nature, sins of will,

Defects of doubt and taints of blood."

the mothers of the land are training men and women who become trustees and priestesses of the high values of their generation. With none too much help they are rearing many to a very high standard of character and ability, and some to genuine greatness. Fred Eastman has shown that greatness is very rarely grown in places of luxury. But a good parent easily overcomes the handicap of poverty in producing greatness. Socrates was the son of a midwife, Joan of Arc was the daughter of a farmer, Leonardo was the son of a servant girl, Michelangelo the son of peasants, Luther of farmers, Shakespeare's father was a butcher, Beethoven's a drunken musician, Carlyle's a stone mason, Lincoln's a roving carpenter, Pasteur's a tanner, Browning's a clerk, Woodrow Wilson's a printer.

Mothers help their children to stock their minds and habits with much that, in later years causes the child to stand up and call his mother blessed,

"You may have riches of wealth untold,

Wonderful jewels and coffers of gold;

Richer than I you can never be,

I had a mother who read to me."

And mothers have a way of helping their children to meet their difficulties and overcome their handicaps. It is a common feeling among children that their parents worry too much over them. When the young are trying their wings, it is difficult for them to understand the concern that their elders feel for them. They would much prefer to make their own mistakes and their own "medicine." But it cannot be so. A mother knows the deep meaning of the scripture:

"Rejoice with them that do rejoice,

And weep with them that weep."

Helen S. Booth has shown how Jesus' mother must have entered into the suffering of her son:

"His mother followed all the way that led him to the cross,

She saw him take the bitter cup and drain it of its dross.

So, changeless still, a mother's love glows through life's weary years
And every dark Gethsemane is hallowed by her tears."

We have said that woman should make the world beautiful, that she should assume responsibility at the controls of society, and we have intimated that she ought to enter into the privileges that come to her as the queen of the home. But one more thing needs to be said: not only that she "should" but that she can.

A small child underwent a serious emergency operation. There were hemorrhages. It was necessary for the father of the child to go quickly to bring a special nurse. He went to the address given him and was met by a young woman whose appearance suggested irresponsibility and whose mouth was busy with chewing gum. As the father and the nurse rode toward the hospital together, there were more misgivings than enthusiasm within his mind. Arriving at their destination, the young woman disappeared. In a few moments she emerged clad in the uniform of her profession. Gone was the indifference and gone the gum. She took her place by the side of the little bed, received her instructions and took up the battle. All night long she scarcely moved her eyes from the little sufferer. By daylight the worst danger from bleeding was past. And when the surgeon returned to examine his little patient, he paid the nurse a high compliment for her skill and faithfulness.

Women are like that. What they need to do and ought to do, they can do. The God of this universe has given them great resources of endurance and courage and capacity for usefulness. He has given them a spirit which our group life needs, without which it cannot be healthy. And God has given women work to do. They cannot fulfill their whole responsibility by remaining within four walls. In most cases it is true that woman's first opportunity is her home. But the home extends beyond the threshold. A perfect home set in a corrupt or alcohol-soaked community cannot long remain a perfect home. A perfect home set in a society that is submerged in war, will probably be washed down into the floods of anxiety and tears.

Nor will men unaided bring in the kingdom of the Parental Spirit. By themselves men can build houses and businesses and states. But they can not protect their own creations from the destruction of their own selfishness and competition and materialism. Women are needed to protect the high human values for which our civilization is supposed to exist.

The mere presence of women in the community is not enough. Their active thought and influence and work are needed. In the proportion that women insist upon the expression of the parental spirit within the home and around the home, will the world become a livable place.

It is the presence of high minded women at work in almost every community that is largely responsible for so much that is positive and healthy in American life.

