

as well as man was recognised as made after the image of God, intended for man's companion, destined to eternal life, and, therefore, needing a moral freedom for the practice of virtue. In their language the word expressing woman did not, like the Greek and Roman name, mean a 'bearer of children,' but another self identical in nature, but varied in sex. She was honored, with the father, as the mother, and had to instruct her children in the fear of the Lord. In common with man, she was to hear the public reading, and so to learn the spirit of the sacred doctrine. These great privileges made her social position higher than in any ancient nation except the Germans.

But there were great drawbacks also. When the Law was given, polygamy and divorce were already customs, and, while the former was tacitly allowed, the latter was expressly regulated by the Law. Thus, on account of the hardheartedness of the people, the pure idea of marriage was defaced. In the ages preceding the Advent of Christ and at the time of His ministry, the unlimited abuse of divorce had become the scourge of domestic life, and threatened even the existence of the nation. Of course, there was no place for the higher meaning and rank of voluntary virginity. In all other nations of the East and South

The Degradation of Woman was Universal.

Only in the far North was there a streak of light, fitful indeed as a sunbeam in Northern storms. The noble German race were almost alone among barbarians in having but one wife and in being faithful to her. No youth, no beauty, no wealth could make up in their eyes for the loss of virtue in woman. Fashion was powerless there, says Tacitus ('Germania,' 18, 19, 20) to make vice merely ridiculous. These Germans supplied later on the raw material of Christendom.

Whence came the great social revolution which reversed the servitude of woman and enabled her to share in equal degree the restoration of man? From the cave of Bethlehem. When the Creator and Redeemer, coming in man's own likeness, living and dying, teaching and suffering for him, claimed him as His own, and disclosed to him his inheritance, woman recovered her rank too. When man had been disrowned, she had been enslaved; for the disowning had been in some sense her special work, and she had been the mother by her own fault of a degraded race. In virtue of that birth in the cave of Bethlehem, and of that Child who was Man Himself, but Son of woman alone, the Christian woman at once took a rank no longer merely relative and dependent, but absolute and her own, as co-heiress with man in all Christian rights and promises. In the beginning of man's history, the messenger of darkness had tempted and overcome the first woman, and severed the bond which united her race with its Maker; many thousand years later, the messenger of light appeared to that second woman. Once more the whole lot of man hung upon a creature; but she did not shrink under the burden; rather, armed with incomparable humility, she bore the destiny of the race entrusted to her up to the very throne of God; a Divine Person became her Son, and she, by accepting the rank of Virgin Mother, restored to her sex, so long a byword for weakness and untrustworthiness, far more than the honor it had lost. Eve, the occasion of her husband's disinheritation and her children's fall, marks the position held by woman through all the centuries prior to Christ, which are simply the carrying out of the Fall in its consequences. Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Redeemer, establishes through all generations of her children the absolute rank and place of woman. In the society founded by Mary's Son woman takes equal rank with man, as a human being, joint partner with him of the promises made and the inheritance bequeathed.

Man and woman then being first restored in themselves, marriage, the primary relation of society, is restored in them. Marriage in its first idea was not a civil contract, the work of man naturally yearning for society, but the institution of God created in view of the Incarnation as future in time, but pre-determined before all things; so that the words spoken by Adam under Divine inspiration when first beholding his wife brought to him by his Creator, had a secret but a certain reference to the act of that Creator in Himself espousing human nature. And the seven attributes which belong to its original institution, as stated above, were given to it as an image of the Incarnation, yet future and undisclosed. For the restoration of marriage it was only requisite to unfold the latent Sacrament. Thus the natural society of man and woman was viewed as the germ of the sacred society of man redeemed; the natural propagation and education of the race became the nursery for the corporeal increase of the Church. Because it would not profit the offspring to be born unless it were reborn, since in the words of St. Augustine, it is born into punishment unless it be reborn unto life.

The subordination of woman to man is consecrated by the relation which the woman bears to the Church and the man to Christ; and so their mutual affection represents the mutual affection of the Bridegroom and the Bride. The bond of marriage is indissoluble, because the Church is the spouse for ever, who may never be repudiated; it is one, because there cannot be two Churches or two Christs; it is holy, because holiness is the end of the whole union between Christ and his Church. In all these the natural relation becomes supported by supernatural assistance, and is the image of a Divine original; and so all the qualities of marriage as it exists in the law of nature obtain by virtue of the Sacrament their highest perfection. This is that

Great Sacrament of Marriage

which the Church first set forth to the world at its age of utmost impotence and incontinence, under Tiberius and Nero, the wife murderers; which she impressed on all the Divine society in the face of the degenerate heathen and luxurious carnal Jew; which she guarded against the wild force and untamed passions of the Northern barbarians when they broke in upon the civil polity of the Empire; which the Sovereign Pontiffs, at the first creation of

modern society, made the public law of Europe; which they maintained unbroken and respected against reluctant kings, ever ready to throw off a yoke that bound them to an equality with the weaker sex, and repelled the caprice of passion and the appetite of change.

Thus the restoration of the society of man and woman rested on the Incarnation, being in all its parts a copy of that great fact. Marriage is the transition point from man as individual to man as a race. The Incarnation put the seal on the individual and on society. Christ, according to St. Cyril, came to the marriage feast of Cana, to bless the beginning of human life, and, being the joy and delight of all men, to reverse the former punishment of woman that she should bear children in sorrow. (In Joan. c. 2, I. Tom., iv., 135.) And it was most fitting that He wrought His first miracle at the intercession of the Virgin Mother.

But theory is widely different from practice. The statements of the Church concerning marriage were no dead letter in her sacred records, to gain the admiration of the student or the praise of the philosopher. They were printed on the minds and actions of men; they formed the tissue of every-day life. She grafted the natural properties of marriage upon a Divine Sacrament, and she declared the marriage of Christians insoluble. Hence she came at once into 'collision' with the heathen Roman world, in which the repudiation of the marriage-bond was a most ordinary occurrence, and in which the unity of marriage was broken by the universal license practised by men with slaves and others. The Church had to oppose public opinion, universal custom, degraded nature, and the strongest human passions. She had to eliminate from society a host of abominations, all tending to diminish the fertility of the human race, and to destroy life in its earlier or later stages. She undertook the gigantic task and she succeeded—the strongest test of her might and influence as a society, in the face of the utmost possible preponderance of material power, wealth, and authority. She rolled back the tide of pollution, she established the basis of all social life, the unity and indissolubility of marriage. She took each soul in the secret of its conscience, held before it a Divine Original, won its love for an uncreated beauty, and its imitation of a transcendent example. With the power of a Sacrament she knit together the decayed, the well-nigh pulverised foundations of social life, and built them up with the solidity of a rock, able to bear the whole superstructure of the City of God. Three centuries after Tacitus had denounced Christians as the enemies of the human race and despairer of Rome's moral life, St. Augustine tells us: 'A marriage once entered upon in the City of God, where, even from the first union of two human beings, nuptials carry a Sacrament, can in no way be dissolved, save by the death of one.' And again: 'The good of marriage consists, among all nations and all men, in the generation of children, and in the fidelity of chastity; but as respects the people of God likewise in the sanctity of the Sacrament, by virtue of which it is a crime even for a repudiated woman to marry another whilst her husband lives, though it were done only to have offspring; for this being the only object of marriage, yet even if it did not ensue, the nuptial bond is not dissolved save by the death of the spouse.' (St. Aug. 'de bono Conjugii,' 17 and 32.)

At the disruption of the Roman Empire by the barbarian hordes and the destruction of most of its civilisation,

The Church Stood Unbroken amid the Ruins.

All things fluctuated save her Divine hierarchy, her teaching, and her Sacraments. After a varied and terrible struggle, whose details no one can trace, she brought the long-haired Kings to wear Christian Crowns and to be anointed within Cathedrals; and, in spite of their savage instincts and passions, she caused them to stoop to the gentle Sacrament of Marriage, and to acknowledge the nuptial bond as one, holy, and indissoluble. Throughout Spain, France, England, Germany, in the halls of the Kings and in the cottage of their serfs, one wife was recognised, in rank her husband's equal, whose place during her life none could take.

Then for a period of 500 years these new monarchies formed a stable alliance with the Church older than themselves. Frequently they exerted their utmost power and the alliance of their sovereignty with the Church, in order, if it might be, to corrupt the judgment of their Father, the Pope, in the affairs of their domestic life reserved to his cognisance. One slighted Queen appeals from her husband to the universal justice of Rome for restitution of her conjugal rights; another, wrongfully divorced, fears to be supplanted by a younger and fair rival; a third has to defend the sterility of her marriage against a husband greedy for heirs; in all these, and similar cases, never did the Popes consent to sacrifice the indissoluble bond of marriage for fear or for reward. It stands recorded to their eternal honor that they suffered a powerful kingdom, and still more powerful race destined to dominion, to break away from their obedience, rather than surrender the right of one deserted wife; for in her right lay the right of all wives and the sanctity of all marriage.

And now we live in a period of entirely different tendencies. Not Kings only, not the rich and the nobles, but society as such is striving to emancipate itself from any law but one self-imposed—a law, not of Christ, but of its own, with parts gathered from paganism, and parts retained from Christianity, the end of which, as it conceives, would be social ease and comfort, material wealth, and worldly prosperity. Humanity, with the resources bestowed upon it by centuries of Christian faith and practice, rises up against anything above itself. It calls law the expression of the general will, not the command of One revered as superior, nor the choice of One loved as good. Before this spirit of self-will assuming the guise of liberty, and sweeping over modern nations as the flame over the prairies, the Church maintains still the self-same law of marriage, as the last defence of the weak against the strong, the last rampart of the family and of society against their invaders. When that mighty and commanding genius, that Caesar of modern