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*Persis Hallock.*

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"Let Your Women  
Keep Silence  
In The Churches."

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"LET YOUR WOMEN KEEP SILENCE  
IN THE CHURCHES."

SHALL never forget that summer evening, a few years ago, at the town of—  
people are still living. We walked out  
—the Doctor and I—in the moonlight, and

passing a church, heard a gospel hymn, and we went in. We found a prayer-meeting just opening. There were about ten men and twenty women. After the usual opening exercises, the minister, a young man of about thirty, spoke for ten or fifteen minutes, and then said the meeting belonged to the others, was in their hands, and all were invited to take part—except the women. I chanced to be looking toward my husband, just as the minister said that. He looked as gentle as ever—and you know how awfully gentle his big face can look—until he heard the words, "except the women." Then his face suddenly hardened, he opened his eyes a trifle wider and stared at the minister, and, I believe, held his breath; then his lips became set, and those wrinkles crept into his forehead. I knew he was angry; and if I had not known him as well as I did, I should almost have expected to see him jump up and denounce the minister, and the tradition that seemed to govern him. But he sat quiet, and as the meeting went on I stole frequent glances at his face and noticed



that the cloud grew blacker. At length there came a pause, when he rose abruptly and walked straight to the front, an unusual thing for him. When he turned, even I was surprised at the placid gentleness of his face. You know he never has any preface, and he began speaking at once, in his quiet way. But I knew there was a thunder storm beyond that blue sky; and so took out my shorthand outfit, which he insists on having me carry wherever I go, and I "took" him verbatim; he said:

"About twenty years ago I was attending an educational institution in this state, where the young ladies and gentlemen gathered on Sunday, before church time, in a Bible-class, and in the evening as a prayer-meeting. The professors who led these meetings were earnest and dignified men. The interest grew until we appointed a week-day meeting, at the hour set apart for recreation. Then we had daily meetings, and for several weeks the deepest interest was manifested, and many of those students gave their hearts to the Saviour. I date my own Christian experience from those blessed days. The words of some of those young women often brought tears to our eyes and kindly trust to our hearts. During my college life I attended a Bible-class of some two or three hundred men and women. Discussion was free and all took part. Since then I have seen both men and women doing God's work in Sunday-schools and other juvenile organizations; in a temperance association of five hundred, and in Y. M. C. Associations. Thus I have seen men and women walking

side by side and hand in hand, co-laborers in the Master's work. And yet, to-night, I hear the women pointedly excluded from the invitation to take part in the exercises."

There was a little rustle among the people, and the minister didn't seem to know whether to look offended or surprised. I knew the Doctor would not stop then, for when he said that, there was a slight indication of the storm with which I knew he was almost bursting.

"What reason can there be for such a course? Has it been your experience that the words of women have done you harm? Not so with me. The best assistance I received at school was from women. In the large Bible-class their questions and remarks were as skillful as those of men. In Sabbath-schools they are nearly always in the majority as teachers. In Y. M. C. A. work, where a pride like that of most men would keep them out, on account of the name, their prayers, their addresses and their songs are among the most effective agencies. There are women preachers whose work God honors as much as He does that of men.

"Women have a courage which some men cannot even appreciate, much less equal. It was our mothers and sisters whose sublime courage wrought that wonderful temperance Crusade of 1873. And it was the same women who followed it up and organized the W. C. T. U., whose work is becoming all-powerful and world-wide. This union is organized with wonderful completeness, national, state, county and local, with numerous departments, all officered by women who do their work in a man-



ner that would put us men to the blush. Their public meetings are models which men would do well to follow.

"Why, then, does any one object to having women speak or pray? Why invite them to a meeting of soul with soul, and then forbid them to say anything? To my mind it is no better than inviting them to dinner and then giving them nothing to eat. Why, I ask, does this feeling of opposition exist? Where did it originate, and why is it kept up? I think it started with a distorted conception of Paul's direction, 'Let your women keep silence in the churches.' And I think your time will be spent to good advantage if you will give a little of it to the examination of the matter from an intelligent and common sense standpoint. Mr. Preacher, I am not speaking against you personally, but against the schools that made you."

By this time the minister had passed through various degrees of surprise, indignation and indifference, and had at last settled down an absorbed and interested listener. As for the people, they were as still as mice, and those whose faces I could see were full of a sort of gladsome eagerness.

"Yes, Paul said it; but to whom did he say it, and under what circumstances? The Corinthian Christians were having a quarrel over the question of buying from heathen dealers the meat which had been used, but not injured, in idol worship. The feeling ran so high that church services were disturbed, and the women added their voices to the general

din. Women were treated then much as women in India have been up to the present time. They were always closely veiled in public; never spoke to a man on the street; followed their husbands like dogs, and, I have been told, never even spoke to them until six months after marriage. For *them* to take part in a public wrangle, therefore, was a gross violation of their whole education.

"Now, if these are facts, it is easy to see that Paul's injunction had no reference to ordinary religious meetings. I suppose they are facts; but even if they are not, just look a step or two further. If we interpret this order literally and apply it to the churches of to-day, must we not, perforce, take other things just as literally? We certainly must, and to begin with, look at the very next verse, I. Cor. 14: 35. It says, 'If the women will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.' Isn't this forbidding them to go to church at all? It must be, for if they went to church they could learn as much as their husbands—and more too for that matter—and wouldn't need to ask them at home. So, now, if Paul told the women to keep silence in the churches, in the same breath he told them not to go there at all, and Paul was too good a lawyer to commit such a blunder. So, friends, this letter to the Corinthians was written specifically to them, and this order had reference to a specific difficulty, and was not intended for all ages and all churches.

"But if any insist on applying it literally, nowadays, they must also apply several other

sayings of Paul's in the same way. Take, for example, II. Cor. 13:12, 'Greet one another with a holy kiss.' The margin gives four references to similar expressions. Was that a general direction to be followed literally forever? I don't think we should like that very well now,—the women at any rate, especially when meeting men who defile themselves with tobacco. And yet there is as much reason for living up to it as there is in the case of silence in the churches. It simply means be cordial and respectful.

"Again, in the 13th of John, Jesus washes the disciples' feet, and tells them to wash one another's feet. Those who claim that Paul's direction to the women is to be followed literally in these days, must, if they are consistent, interpret the feet-washing in the same way. No one does that, as the feet are dressed differently in different climates, and customs vary; but the beautiful teaching of serving our fellows will outlast time.

"Paul also says, I. Tim. 2:9; I. Peter. 3:3, that women shall not braid their hair, nor wear ornaments. Shall this be understood literally? If not, why not, as much as the other?

"Going on with the literal application, we find in I. Tim. 2:12, 'For I suffer not a woman to teach.' How would that suit? Mr. Preacher, do you forbid these women to teach in your Sabbath-school? If not, you are inexcusably inconsistent; for the same authority that tells them to keep silence in the churches, says explicitly that they must not teach.

"And further, if you wish to be literal, why, in the name of the commonest sort of reasoning, *aren't* you literal? Don't the words read 'keep silence'? Can a woman sing who is keeping silence? By what conceivable distortion of meaning can you say that keeping silence allows her to sing but not to speak? You let a woman stand up and sing 'Come to Jesus,' and make no objections. But if she changes the tone of her voice to that of speaking, you suddenly hold up the Bible and tell her to keep silence—meaning to make more noise, by singing instead of speaking. To what length of unreasonable inconsistency does this lead?

"And then, too, in the matter of teaching. You let a woman teach a class of ten young men. She may ask each one to bring another, and so on, until she has a large congregation. At what point will it appear that she is not properly keeping silence? The Bible makes no distinction between teaching in Sunday-school and in church, even if you do.

"And here is a point which I think you will admit has some force: it is common to urge recent converts to speak, on account of the benefit to themselves in this public acknowledgment, and to comply with Christ's direction that His followers should acknowledge Him before men, if they would have Him acknowledge them before His Father in Heaven. Is there anything in this? Is it an advantage thus to testify for Jesus? Does it help the soul, and beget Christian courage and zeal, to tell your friends of your change of heart and



purpose? You say, Yes; and I ask, Is the need any greater for men than for women? And would you dare, for one moment, to say that Jesus gave this direction to *men only*? And would you dare accuse Paul of any such inconsistency, when he says that in Christ there is neither bond nor free, male nor female, but all are one? I can scarcely command patience to present this matter in quiet argument, it is so self-evident to me, and yet those who never look into it need to be shown the real attitude of the Bible.

"Just here is a point for the literalists, and is every whit as good as some of their arguments: Christ says we must acknowledge Him *before men*. How can women do it if you forbid them to speak in a meeting when a man happens to be present? And where is your authority for having men acknowledge Him before women?"

"No, no, friends; I believe we all think, in our hearts, that these Bible rules are intended for us to follow *in spirit*, and not necessarily *in letter*. Many of them are based on customs of the time when they were written, and are obviously not appropriate for us."

We had lately heard the evangelist, Dr. Munhall, on this subject, and I could see that he was using his ideas, principally, though more briefly, in different words, and with additions of his own:

"But public speaking by women can be defended even by literal translations. Mother Anna spoke in the temple to all who were there (Luke 2:38), and the women of Samaria

went about the streets telling of Christ (John 4:28). Philip's four daughters publicly expounded the Scriptures (Acts 21:8, 9). Several women are mentioned in Romans 16 as having done public work, among whom Phœbe is called a 'servant of the church,' which means that she worked in the church. In Philippians 4:3, Paul speaks of women who worked with him in the Gospel. And in Galatians 3:28, he says directly that in Christ there is neither bond nor free, male nor female, thus at a stroke placing the sexes on a perfect equality. There is a place in I. Corinthians (11:5) where Paul speaks of a widow's praying, or prophesying, as if it were no unusual thing, but rather a matter of course. In fact, he gives directions for her dress during these exercises, which would be a very illogical act if he forbade her to take part in them. Aquilla and Priscilla instructed Apollos in the very things he was preaching about (Acts 18:26). This, I think, shows that women took part in religious meetings in Paul's time, whether they do now or not. But there is one other point, and I will stop. Do those who 'except the women' from invitations to take part in church services, object to having them sent as missionaries? If they do they are consistent, and I find no fault with them on this particular point. But if they are willing to let women go abroad and preach and teach among foreigners, including half-civilized men, while they object to their doing the same thing among their kindred, and even in their own parlors, then, I say, the very climax of extravagant inconsistency is reached."

shall not say a word about religion when a man hears her.

"Now, if you are not ashamed of the unreasonable, the inconsistency, the Pharisaical complacency of the ground you have occupied, you must be made of cast iron. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth in a meeting where my wife's voice is not as welcome as my own! Rather, let me stay away from that meeting altogether!

"Oh, my sainted mother! Would God you were here to-night, that I might kneel at your feet and hear from those sweet lips the blessed story of Jesus and His love! Would to God a spirit like yours might permeate every gathering of His children! Would to God I could lead a life of such usefulness as to be worthy such a lofty example as yours! But, thanks to His Holy name, I can bring my dear ones with me to that blessed country on high, where sorrows are not known, and whose associations give ever-increasing joy!"

He could not keep back the tears, and I believe half the audience cried, too. He walked quickly down the aisle, and out of the room—I slipping after him. I glanced back and saw the minister lifting his hands for the people to rise and be dismissed. I took my husband's arm, and we strode along without speaking a word. He is always a little embarrassed when he has shown any feeling. The hotel parlor being empty, we sat down there, when he looked at me with a smile that betrayed a touch of his love of the humorous, and asked, "Did I say anything very bad?" Before I could answer

we heard steps, and then the young minister with radiant face, rushed in and seized both my husband's hands, and burst out with, "You're right, every way! I'm glad you did it! From this time forth I shall obey my conscience!" I hardly know what he said, as I was not reporting then; but I know that nearly the whole congregation was there, and such I joyful chattering, especially among men, a never did see, before nor since.





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