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# WOMAN'S PLACE

IN THE

# CHURCH

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By  
BACKHOUSE. HODGKIN

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ERRATUM.

Page 19, last paragraph, first line, for  
*accustomed* read *unaccustomed*.

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THE following paper is the outcome of an endeavour to ascertain the real teaching of the New Testament on the subject discussed. For this purpose the writer tried, successfully, he believes, to put aside his own opinions, and honestly to face the question "What saith the Scripture?"

The notes of this investigation were put into the form of a lecture, several quotations which corroborated the results arrived at being subsequently introduced. The lecture is now printed, substantially as delivered, without any attempt to improve its literary form.

Darlington,

February, 1907.

## Woman's Place in the Church.

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THIS is one of the subjects on which most men find it hard to free themselves from the influence of early habit and preconceived notions. It is, therefore, desirable in approaching it, that we should make special efforts to free ourselves from such influences, and to enter upon our inquiry with open and unprejudiced minds.

1.—In the first place let us consider how the popular method of looking at the whole question is affected by the English language. It would seem as if most people were in the habit of forgetting that

"HE" means "HE OR SHE"

except where this is excluded by the context\* It is owing to the poverty of our language that we have to use the word in this double sense.

We have the word "parent" to include both "father" and "mother," and the word "children" to include both "son" and "daughter"; but

\* cf. "The Interpretation Act" of 1889.

there is no word which means "he or she," and therefore we have to use the word "he" for this purpose, as well as for the individual male.

Many people shirk this difficulty by the ungrammatical use of the plural pronoun; an ugly and confusing habit. The following sentences, noted as they were uttered, are ordinary instances of this:—

"To any *one* renewing *their* subscriptions . . ."

"Every *one* has it in *them* to write a good book."

"Any *one* who could put a basket on *their* head . . ."

I have also heard the following painful misquotation from John vii. 37:—

"If any *one* thirst, let *them* come unto me and drink."

Others try to hide their perplexity by saying "he or she," a clumsy and awkward expression at the best; yet the following is far from being a rare example:—

"When the speaker has been selected, *he or she* should be informed of the time which will be placed at *his or her* disposal."

The translators of the Revised Version of our Bible have been even more free from such errors than their predecessors, as an example of which I may quote Num. vi. 2, 3. "When *either man or woman* shall make a special vow, the vow of a Nazarite, to separate *himself* unto the Lord: *he*

shall separate *himself* from wine and strong drink;" etc.

2.—Bearing in mind the fundamental fact that "he" means "he or she," we may find much generally unnoticed corroboration of the truth stated by Paul that "there can be no male and female: for ye all are 'one man (*etis*) in Christ Jesus.'" (Gal. iii. 28).

For instance, the Epistle to the Colossians is addressed (Col. i. 2), "to the saints and faithful *brethren* in Christ which are at Colossæ," and these brethren included the *wives*, who were addressed in Col. iii. 18.

Again, Rev. xxii. 17 reads, "And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take of the water of life freely." "He that is athirst" must also mean "She that is athirst": therefore, "let him say, Come" must also mean "let her say, Come."

The last illustration I will give under this head will be found in 1 Cor. xvi. 2. "And upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by *him* in store, as *he* may prosper, that no collection be made when I come." No one has suggested that women should not share the privilege of giving money for the use of the Church. Why then should they be restrained from showing themselves "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter iv.



10), especially seeing that, in the light of what has been previously said, the words following the reference to this stewardship may be translated "if any *one* (*tis*) speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any *one* (*tis*) ministereth ministering as of the strength which God supplieth" ?

3.—In a full consideration of Woman's place in the Church, we ought to examine those duties which are especially her province, such as :—

(a) The instruction of children,

(b) The influence of wives on their husbands,

(c) Womanly ministries of various kinds, such as tending the sick, caring for the poor, and so forth ;

but as these are matters upon which all are practically agreed, it is needless to dwell upon them on the present occasion.

4.—Similarly the fact that all through the Christian Era many women have been conspicuous examples

of faith, Acts xvi. 14, 16 : Lydia.

Acts xvii. 12 : Women of honourable estate.

Acts xviii. 34 : Damaris.

and of faithfulness under persecution, (Acts viii. 3. ; ix. 2),

setting an example which men have not always been prompt to follow, needs only to be alluded to in passing.

5.—It seems clear that Women had some official position in the early Christian Church, although it may not be very easy to determine to what extent this was accorded.

In Acts vi. 1-6, we have the first appointment of officials, Stephen and his companions being appointed to "serve tables." On this occasion no women were selected, but the negative evidence of this passage is surely of little value against the positive evidence to be found elsewhere.

In Rom. xvi. 1, Phoebe is spoken of as "a servant of the Church that is at Cenchreæ" ; and in the margin of the R.V., "deaconess" is given as an alternative for the word "servant." Are not both text and margin evidence that even the learned translators were under the influence of unconscious traditional prejudice ; for the word translated "servant" or "deaconess" is precisely the same as that used by Paul of himself and Apollos in 1 Cor. iii. 5, where it is translated "minister," and by the same writer in 1 Tim. iii. 12, where it is translated "deacon" ? Why should not Phoebe have her proper title and be reckoned amongst the ministers or deacons of the early Church ?

Again, in Rom. xvi. 7, we read, "Salute Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note amongst the Apostles." A marginal note suggests that "Junias" might

be read "Junia," and, although it is impossible to decide with absolute certainty from the form of the Greek word whether a man or a woman is intended, it is worthy of note that Chrysostom, who is generally considered a high authority on matters relative to the use of the Greek language, accepts "Junia" as the correct translation, for he says:—"How great is the devotion (*φιλοσοφία*) of this woman that even of the Apostles' name she should be deemed worthy." (Lightfoot's *Galatians*, p. 96).

Passing by a possible allusion to women deacons in 1 Tim. iii. 11, let us look for a moment at 1 Tim. v. 1, 2. These verses read as follows:—

"Rebuke not an Elder, but exhort him as a father; the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters in all purity."

The word translated "elder women" in v. 2 is simply the feminine form of the word translated "elder" in v. 1. It would, therefore, seem as though an official position must in this message be attributed either to *both* men and women or to *neither*. If the former alternative be selected, the two words might be translated "man elder" and "women elders" respectively.

6.—That *pastoral work* was undertaken by women in the early Church seems abundantly clear, and the importance of their position in this respect

seems emphasised by the curious fact that, while Paul \* and Luke † speak of "Aquila and Priscilla," when they first mention this noteworthy couple, each of them on every subsequent occasion refers to them as "Priscilla and Aquila," as if the wife had become the more important of the two. Especially is this order noteworthy in connection with their instruction of Apollos (Acts xviii. 26). "But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more carefully." (This is one place where the R.V. corrects an error in the Authorised). The following quotation from the *South African Pioneer* for February, 1898, shows how the significance of this incident impressed the writer of the article there (Dr. A. J. Gordon).

"But how natural is this story, and how perfectly accordant with subsequent Christian history! We can readily imagine that, after listening to this Alexandrian orator, Priscilla would say to her husband: 'Yes, he is eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, but you do not see that he lacks the secret of power.' And so they took him and instructed him concerning the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, with the result that he who had been mighty in the Scriptures, now 'mightily convinced the Jews.' How often has this scene been repro-

\* 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Rom. xvi. 3; 2 Tim. iv. 19.

† Acts xviii. 2; xviii. 18; xviii. 26.



duced; as, *e.g.*, in the instance of Catherine of Siena, instructing the corrupt clergy of her day in the things of the Spirit till they exclaimed in wonder, 'Never man spake like this woman'; of Madame Guyon, who, by her teaching made new men of scores of accomplished but unspiritual preachers of her time; of the humble woman of whom the evangelist Moody tells, who, on hearing some of his early sermons, admonished him of his need of the secret power, and brought him under unspeakable obligation by teaching him of the same. It is evident that the Holy Spirit made this woman Priscilla a teacher of teachers, and that her theological chair has had many worthy incumbents through the subsequent Christian ages."

In Rom. xvi. we have a reference to the pastoral work of several women:—

v. 6: "Mary, who bestowed much labour on you."

v. 12: "Tryphæna and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord."

"Persis the beloved, which laboured much in the Lord."

v. 13: "Salute Rufus the chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine."

Paul can hardly mean that Rufus was his own brother, but rather that Rufus' mother had been a spiritual mother to him.

Finally, in Phil. iv. 3, we have the exhortation: "Help those women, for they laboured with me in the Gospel," a term which is wide enough to cover both pastoral and evangelistic work, in private and in public.

7.—In considering the work of *women as preachers* it is well to remember that the word "preachers" as now used, includes those who exercise the gift of prophecy and those who work as evangelists; prophecy not necessarily meaning *foretelling* future events, but *forthtelling* the message of God. (See Alford's note on 1 Cor. xii. 10, as follows):—"(*προφητεία*) speaking in the spirit. Meyer gives an excellent definition of it: 'discourse flowing from the revelation and impulse of the Holy Spirit, which, not being attached to any particular office in the Church, but improvised,—disclosed the depths of the human heart and of the divine counsel, and thus was exceedingly effectual for the enlightening, exhortation, and consolation of believers, and the winning of unbelievers. The *prophet* differs from the *speaker with tongues* . . . in that he speaks *with the understanding*, not ecstasically: from the *διδάσκαλος*, thus: *ὁ μὲν προφητεύων πάντα ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος φθέγγεται ὁ δὲ διδάσκων ἐστὶν ὅπου καὶ ἐξ οἰκείας διαλέγεται*, as Chrys. on ver. 28.'"

As we are dealing not with the Jewish, but with the Christian Church, it is needless to give

a list of women who prophesied under the old Covenant, the last in this section being Anna (Luke ii. 36).

The following examples of women who acted either as prophets or as evangelists in the early days of the Christian Church should, however, be noted in connection with the prophecy of Joel, which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost (Joel ii. 28-32; Acts ii. 17, 18), indicating that the prophesying of women should be one sign of the Gospel days:—

"And it shall be in the last days, saith God,

"I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh:

"And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

"And your young men shall see visions,

"And your old men shall dream dreams:

"Yea, and on my servants and on my hand-maidens in those days

"Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

(a) The woman of Samaria left her water pot and went into the city and saith to the men, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?" (John iv. 28, 29).

As the result of this preaching we read (verse 39)

"From that city many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman

who testified, 'he told me all things that ever I did.'"

(b) John xx. 11-18. Mary Magdalene was the first herald of the Resurrection. Surely it would be strange if, seeing that this honour was conferred upon a woman, all other women should be commanded to refrain from carrying a similar message.

Note that when the Apostles entered upon their work they gave the same witness and the same message that Mary Magdalene had done.

Acts iv. 33, "and with great power gave the Apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

See also Acts xvii. 18, etc.

(c) Acts viii. 3, 4. "Saul laid waste the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word."

This passage would seem to imply that they who "went about preaching the word" were both men and women.

(d) Acts xxi. 9. "Now this man had four daughters, virgins, who did prophesy."

8.—What has been already said might suffice to show the practice of the early Church, but many people say that such evidence as the foregoing avails nothing against the express precepts found in the New Testament forbidding women to preach.



Let us therefore examine these precepts candidly and carefully, and see whether they are intended to encourage or discourage the preaching and prophesying of women.

(a) In 1 Cor. xii. 4-11, we have a description of various gifts and ministrations given to one or another through the Spirit, and there is no hint that those who receive and exercise these gifts (including that of prophecy) do not include women as well as men. It is true that in such expressions as "to one is given . . . the word of wisdom . . . to another prophecy," the words "one" and "another" are masculine in the original Greek; but this arises from the structure of the language, there being here, as in English, no words which would equally mean "one man or one woman" or "another man or another woman," as the case might be. Note that in verses 7 and 11 the R.V. says "each one" where the Authorised says "every man."

(b) 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35. "Let the women keep silence in the Churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the Church."

Instead of dealing with this passage in my own words, I will quote those of Dr. A. J. Gordon (*South African Pioneer*, January 1898, p. 194):—

"Here again the conduct of women in the Church should be studied in relation to that of men if we would rightly understand the Apostle's teaching. Let us observe, then, that the injunction to silence is three times served in this chapter by the use of the same Greek word *συνιω*, twice on men and once on women, and that in every case the silence commanded is *conditional*, not absolute.

" 'Let him keep silence in the Church' (verse 28), it is said of one speaking with tongues, but *on the condition* that 'there be no interpreter.' 'Let the first keep silence' (verse 30), it is said of the prophets, 'speaking by two or three'; but it is *on condition* that 'a revelation be made to another sitting by.'

" 'Let the women keep silence in the Church,' it is said again, but it is evidently *on condition* of their interrupting the service with questions, since it is added, 'for it is not permitted them to speak, . . . and if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.' This last clause takes the injunction clearly out of all reference to praying or prophesying, and shows—what the whole chapter indicates—that the Apostle is here dealing with the various forms of disorder and confusion in the Church; not that he is repressing the decorous exercise of spiritual gifts, either by men or by women. If he were forbidding women to pray or to prophesy in public, as some argue,

what could be more irrelevant or meaningless than his direction concerning the case: 'If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home'?"

(c) 1 Tim. ii. 8, 9. If we accept the judgment of Chrysostom and other competent commentators, this passage should be translated as follows:—

"I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing. In like manner, I desire that women pray in modest apparel, etc."

If this be the correct rendering of the passage, it should be noted that the words "in every place" must include places of public worship as well as the family circle.

The word "silence" which we find according to the A.V. in the eleventh verse of the same chapter is rightly changed by the revisers into "quietness," so that the verse now reads—"Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection"; just as, in 2 Thess. iii. 12, Paul gives the exhortation both to men and women "that with quietness they work and eat their own bread."

(d) The foregoing interpretation of 1 Tim. ii. 8, 9 is rendered more probable from a comparison with 1 Cor. xi. 4, 5, which reads as follows:—

"Every man praying or prophesying, having the head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman praying or prophesying with her head

unveiled dishonoureth her head: for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven."

Here again I will quote the words of others, and first of all, those of Dr. A. J. Gordon (*South African Pioneer*, January 1898, p. 194):—

"By common consent the reference is here to public worship; and the decorous manner of taking part therein is pointed out first for the men and then for the women. 'Every woman praying or prophesying.' Bengel's terse comment: 'Therefore women were not excluded from these duties,' is natural and reasonable. It is quite incredible, on the contrary, that the Apostle should give himself the trouble to prune a custom which he desired to uproot, or that he should spend his breath in condemning a forbidden *method* of doing a forbidden thing. This passage is strikingly like the one just considered, in that the proper method of doing having been prescribed, first for the man, and then for the woman, it is impossible to conclude that the thing to be done is then enjoined only upon the one party, and forbidden to the other. If the words 'in like manner' have proved such a barrier to commentators against finding an injunction for the silence of women in 1 Tim. ii. 9, the unlike manner pointed out in this passage is not less difficult to be surmounted by those who hold that women are forbidden to participate in public worship. As the first passage has been shown



to give sanction to woman's praying in public, this one points not less strongly to her habit of both praying and prophesying in public."

This view is endorsed by Dr. Jacob, whose position as a clergyman of the Established Church, and formerly Headmaster of Christ's Hospital, gives a special significance to the following passage: (*Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament*, pp. 46, 47). "A due consideration of this 'Ministry of Gifts' in the earliest days of Christianity,— 'those times of high and sanctified spiritual freedom'—both shows and justifies the custom of the public ministration of women at that time in the Church. The very ground and title of this ministry being the acknowledged possession of some spiritual gift—and such gifts being bestowed on women as well as men—the former as well as the latter were allowed to use them in the Christian assemblies. This seems to me quite evident from St. Paul's words in 1 Cor. xi. 5, where he strongly condemns the practice of women 'praying or prophesying' *with the head unveiled*, without expressing the least objection to this public ministration on their part, but only finding fault with what was considered an unseemly attire for women thus publicly engaged.

"The injunction contained in this same Epistle (1 Cor. xiv. 34), 'Let your women keep silence in the Churches, for it is not permitted unto them

to speak,' refers, as the context shows, not to prophesying or praying in the congregation, but to making remarks, and asking questions about the words of others. The directions given to Timothy at a later period (1 Tim. ii. 11, 12), and forbidding 'a woman to teach or usurp authority over the man' seem also to have no reference to spiritual gifts, and therefore to be no contradiction to what has been before allowed."

9.—*Modern Practice.* To any who are members of the Society of Friends the foregoing argument may have seemed tedious and superfluous. These have been accustomed from childhood to hear the Gospel message from the lips of women, whose words have often been so evidently spoken "in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. ii. 4), that it was impossible to question the Divine origin of their call to service. That there have been exceptions goes without saying, for the "treasure," great as it is, is always in an "earthen vessel" (2 Cor. iv. 7); but there have been similar exceptions in the history of male preachers, and no one makes this excuse for saying that *men* are to "keep silence in the Churches." (Cf. 1 Cor. xiv. 34. § 8 (b), supra).

To those who are accustomed to the ministry of women the argument may seem inconclusive; not, I venture to hope, through any flaw in the reasons adduced, but through the tendency of

the human mind to require absolutely overwhelming evidence before surrendering opinions which have been long accepted as correct.

Anyone who is confronted with this difficulty may fairly ask himself:—"Am I prepared to run the risk of 'quenching the Spirit' (cf. 1 Thess. v. 19) by stopping the mouth of a woman who believes that she is 'inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost' (Prayer Book: 'the making of deacons') to preach the Gospel; and can I honestly rely on Holy Scripture as my warrant for undertaking this grave responsibility?"

In the providence of God, each sex has a special influence on the other; and this influence should be used in God's service, in response to His call. Many years ago I ventured to suggest to a large company of Nonconformist Ministers that the suppression of the Ministry of Women was one reason for the small proportion of men to women in most congregations of Christian worshippers, and no one attempted to express a contrary opinion.

The preaching of Elizabeth Fry, of Catherine Booth, and of many other women, has received the seal of the Lord's blessing; and where is the man who would dare to say that these had mistaken the call of the Lord? The following quotation from Dr. A. J. Gordon (*South African Pioneer*, March 1898, p. 226) shows how the power of

the Lord's Spirit has broken down prejudice in relation to the public service of women:—

"Annie Taylor's missionary tour into Thibet has been the subject of world-wide comment. And now she is returning to that vast and perilous field with a considerable company of missionary recruits, both men and women, herself the leader of the expedition. In this enterprise of carrying the Gospel into the regions beyond, and preaching Christ to all classes, she is as full a missionary as was Paul, or Columba, or Boniface. Yet in all the comments of the religious press we have never once heard the question raised as to whether, in thus acting, she were not stepping out of woman's sphere, as defined in Scripture.

"When before the Exeter Hall Missionary Conference in 1858, Secretary Murdoch described the work of Mrs. Ingalls, of Burmah, declaring that though not assuming ecclesiastical functions, yet by force of character on the one hand, and by the exigencies of the field on the other, she had come to be a virtual bishop over nearly a score of Churches, training the native ministry in theology and homiletics, guiding the Churches in the selection of pastors, and superintending the discipline of the congregations, the story evoked only applause, without a murmur of dissent from the distinguished body of missionary leaders who heard it.

"When at that same conference, the represen-



tative of the Karen Mission having failed, it was asked whether there was any missionary present who could speak for that remarkable work, the reply was, 'Only one, and she is a woman.' She was unhesitatingly accepted as the speaker; and though at first demurring, she finally consented, and had the honour of addressing perhaps the most august array of missionary leaders which has convened in this century. The clear and distinct tones in which Mrs. Armstrong told her story did not suggest 'silence'; but the modesty and reserve of her bearing completely answered to the Scripture requirement of 'quietness.' And though she had among her auditors missionary secretaries, Episcopal bishops, Oxford professors and Edinburgh theologians, not the slightest indication of objection to her services was anywhere visible.

"We vividly remember, in the early days of women's work in the foreign field, how that brilliant missionary to China, Miss Adele Fielde, was recalled by her Board because of the repeated complaints of the senior missionaries that in her work she was transcending her sphere as a woman. 'It is reported that you have taken upon you to preach,' was the charge read by the chairman; 'is it so?' She replied by describing the vastness and destitution of her field—village after village, hamlet after hamlet, yet unreached by the Gospel—and

then how, with a native woman, she had gone into the surrounding country, gathered groups of men women and children—whoever would come—and told out the story of the Cross to them. 'If this is preaching, I plead guilty to the charge,' she said. 'And have you ever been ordained to preach?' asked her examiner. 'No,' she replied, with great dignity and emphasis, '*no; but I believe I have been foreordained.*' O woman! you have answered discreetly; and if any shall ask for your fore-ordination credentials, put your finger on the words of the prophet: 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,' and the whole Church will vote to send you back unhampered to your work, as, happily, the Board did in this instance."

#### 10.—Our duty now.

Unless the foregoing argument can be proved to be incorrect, it is surely our duty to take every right opportunity for bringing back the Christian Church to a right conception of her Lord's Will on this important matter, and to do this at the risk of offending ancient prejudice, and even of grieving long-loved friends.

Again, those women who recognise that God has called them to preach the Gospel, or to engage publicly in prayer or praise, are surely grieving His Holy Spirit when they disobey the call. The liberty which they have is of no value unless it is

used, and used in trustful reliance on the Lord Jesus, in whose Name, by whose authority, and to whose glory, every gift should be exercised. We want no preaching, whether from women or from men, which does not glorify our crucified, risen, and exalted Saviour; neither will congregations be edified by wordy discourses not prompted by the Holy Spirit. But we do want absolute faithfulness in the delivery of every message, and by such faithfulness will the rightness and value of Women's ministry be most effectually upheld.

So shall the ancient words of the sixty-eighth Psalm have a new and repeated fulfilment:—

“The Lord giveth the word:

The women that publish the tidings are a great host.”—Psalm lxviii. 12.

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PRICE ONE PENNY.

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