

## **Chapter 13 Woman and Public Speaking**

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WOMEN AND PUBLIC SPEAKING.

Although I was called to make my first speech by a budding "Free Church" minister, and blessed and encouraged at my first public lecture by a distinguished Church of England Divine, it must not be supposed for a moment that any woman could as an ordinary, permissible action address an audience from a platform. In those days it was still considered a masculine preserve — was platform oratory!

It is almost impossible for the present generation to realize the utter change that has been brought about in the general mind, the collective prejudices of ordinary persons, as to what women can do and what women ought to do; and this is *most* especially the case about public speaking. A woman addressing a Public Meeting or a learned Society is now no novelty at all; it hardly arouses any special remark. But when I (and other women) began to address Public Meetings on Women's Enfranchisement, women speakers were still so rare that it is no exaggeration to say that the Suffrage speakers were the first ~~ladies~~ ladies ever seen on a lecture platform by thousands amongst their audiences. I have heard this statement repeatedly from people I have met — Olive Schreiner, by the way, was one of them — both in those early days and in after years: "Ah, you were the first women I ever heard make a public speech!"

Until the woman's suffrage movement began, and indeed until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, there was a fixed



conviction in the general mind, held by women themselves as well as by men, and one dating from time immemorial, that no lady could, should, or would, stand up in an assembly ~~of~~ of strangers, and, in a voice raised enough to reach many ears, utter her own thoughts and opinions in her own words. It was a settled certainty with almost everybody that a lady could not do this effectively even if she would, and should not even if she could. Dr Johnson had not thought that he made himself ridiculous by saying that "A woman speaking in public is like a dog walking on its hind legs; it is not surprising that it is not well done the wonder is that the creature can do it at all!" This sounds absurd to-day, but in his Century, and for long after, there was no experience of women's now proved capacity for clear, concise, impressive oratory, because public opinion uncompromisingly barred "the creature" from the proof. Women were, without a glimmer of doubt as to the propriety of the course, required to be like good little children in drawing-rooms — seen but not heard.

This chose jugée attitude rested largely on the constant repetition in the Christian churches of the dicta of St Paul. Did he not order all women to "keep silence"? Had he not said "It is not permitted unto them to speak; for they are commanded to be under obedience .... and I suffer not a woman to teach ... it is a shame for women to speak in the Church", and so on?



But though this severe and precise prohibition was received by Christian women with sad meekness and Christian pastors with glad complacency as a direct and final revelation from Heaven above, Paganism had been equal to formulating a similar prohibition on purely secular grounds of propriety. Plutarch knew nothing of Paul, but he intimates a like-minded opinion.

"Theano, as she was putting on her shawl, displayed her arm, and somebody observing, 'What a handsome arm!' she replied: 'But not common property.' So ought not even the speech, any more than the arm, of a chaste woman, to be common, especially in the presence of strangers, for speech must be considered as it were the exposing of the mind. For in words are seen the state of mind and character and disposition of the speaker.....  
~~But~~ A wife ought only to speak either to her husband, or by her husband, not being vexed if, like a flute-player, she speaks more decorously through another mouthpiece."

The same idea finds an amusing modern expression in Boaden's "Life of John Kemble." He is describing the farewell to the stage of Kemble's celebrated sister, Mrs. Siddons, in the year 1818. *He says:*

"Her farewell" ~~he says~~, "was in verse, and was written by her nephew, Mr. Twiss. There were persons who thought that a

Plutarch's Morals: "Conjugal Precepts."

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prose address would have been more striking and suitable to such a parting - but I think they did not consider that there is always something indelicate in sending a Lady, in her own person, to talk to a mixed assembly of some thousand people. Under a pressing sense of injustice and persecution, to come suddenly forward, and with a pledge of your innocence, claim their protection, (as Mrs. Siddons had done on one occasion) has a quick feeling to urge it, that absolves the slight indecorum. A poetical address partakes more of dramatic representation - the care as to just recitation, and the uttering the studied composition of another mind, relieves in a great degree the performer's own!"

If "a lady's delicacy" and obvious "decorum" would be outraged <sup>when</sup> an actress, <sup>who was</sup> accustomed not only to making herself heard by a thousand people, but to representing herself as in the most painful and embarrassing dramatic situations, ~~it~~ should address a few sentences to her friends in front in her own words, how much more grossly indecent and unladylike would such an action be if perpetrated by a private "female?" That this was <sup>then</sup> a fully accepted doctrine is shown by the fact that, while the sympathy and assistance of women were freely called upon to aid in the great political agitations of the early part of the Nineteenth Century, it was never as orators. In the ~~great~~ effort led by Wilberforce that finally abolished slavery wherever the British flag should fly; in the first <sup>(1832)</sup> Reform Bill agitation; in the Anti-



Corn Law League Campaign - and the rest - women were asked to form Ladies' Committees, to get up great Bazaars to raise funds, and so on, but never to speak on the platforms of the organised Societies.

When a great World's Anti-Slavery Convention was held in London in 1840, the American Anti-Slavery party sent over several women delegates, but the English organizers of the great gathering absolutely refused to allow these women, merely because of their sex, to take any part in the proceedings; and William Lloyd Garrison performed one of the noblest acts of his devoted life when he refused to join in a Conference from which the women who shared with him the perils of the front line at the seat of war were excluded. He took a place in the gallery with the silenced and rejected women delegates, and remained silent with them: and this the Convention actually allowed to occur.

Although the United States of America have been about fifty years in advance of England in giving women their "rights" in many respects, the prejudice against their speaking in public was so strong in 1852 that at a Convention of "The Sons of Temperance," at Albany, to which the "Daughters" had been invited to send delegates, when one of these, Susan B. Anthony, rose to speak to a motion, she was ordered to sit down again by the President; who informed her that "the Sisters were not invited there to speak, but to listen and learn." [In like manner, a year later still (1853) a great Convention of temperance advocates

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in New York was practically absorbed for three whole days in a riotous determination not to allow a woman to speak. The leader of the opposition, a Reverend (of course) J. Chambers, stood for half an hour pointing his finger at her, and shouting incessantly "Shame on the Woman!" She was the Rev. Antoinette Brown, an accredited delegate from two Societies; and she stood on the platform the first day, in the midst of a ceaseless uproar, for an hour and a half, "not because she was anxious to speak, but to establish the principle that an accredited delegate should not be denied the right of speech, on account of her sex; but she was finally compelled to leave the Hall." The next two days were largely occupied with motions and counter-motions on the same subject, but Miss Brown was never allowed to speak.

This prohibitive public opinion continued in full force until almost the end of the Nineteenth Century. We early platform speakers for "Women's rights," asking for the Vote, for more equal marriage laws, for better education, for more open careers, in a word, for equal rights in the State for our sex, were dubbed "shrieking sisters," and were told that "Women's rights were only asked for by men's lefts," that women speakers were "forfeiting man's protection," "outraging the refinement and modesty of womanhood," and so on.

After the first Meeting to advocate the right to vote for Members of Parliament being extended to women who were independent taxpayers was held in London, in 1870, at which two ladies spoke,



an M.P. in his place in the House of Commons referred to them as "Wives of Members of the House who have disgraced themselves, but he would not further disgrace them by mentioning their names to this House."

Women of rank and wealth might indeed on occasion softly murmur on platforms that they declared bazaars open or foundation stones well and truly laid, but nothing more. Even in acknowledging a vote of thanks for her presence, the lady would find her reply arranged for by proxy. When Harriot Lady Dufferin returned to her native land after a prolonged absence as Ambassador and *wife of a* Governor-General, she was asked if she saw any marked change in English Society, and replied that she found she was now expected to make her own speeches whereas before she went away some gentleman always made them for her. I have repeatedly seen Queen Victoria's clever daughters sit as though they were dumb on platforms while some man orated in their name: "H.R.H. desires me to say." Their brothers the Princes of course spoke for themselves on like occasions; but as we have seen, "decorum" silenced all ladies.

Professor James Stuart, M.P., of Cambridge, records that when he gave some of the first lectures under the University Extension scheme, in 1867, and onwards, though his audiences consisted of ladies only, "at each town a man was brought in at the opening lecture to introduce me, and also at the concluding lecture when a vote of thanks was to be proposed, it being thought at that



time quite inadmissible for any lady to address any assembly, even though it consisted entirely of women."

So recently as 1880, Mr. Maitland tells in his "Life of Anna Kingsford, M.D." that "Vehement and virulent" opposition was raised in Committee to her speaking on the platforms of the International Anti-Vivisection Society, "simply and solely on the ground that she was a woman." The sacerdotal element, he says, was strong on the Committee, and strenuously objected to "suffering a woman to teach" on any subject whatsoever. Ultimately the clerical ringleaders of this opposition were persuaded to withdraw their ~~opposition~~<sup>ban</sup>, as the aid of any person holding a Medical degree was of great value, and they agreed only on the score that this beautiful and most feminine woman "was a man by her mind and her profession!"

It is undoubtedly the case that the clergy of every denomination have been the most "vehement and virulent" opponents of women as public speakers; partly of course because of the lead given by Paul and partly, one cannot but suspect, from a spice of professional jealousy as themselves by far the largest class of public speakers. Yet though this is the fact, I almost hesitate to write it, remembering as I do our many influential and courageous advocates amongst the clergy, and the very numerous occasions when ministers (both of the Established and the Free Churches, though chiefly the latter) have taken the chair when I spoke or addressed meetings with me, giving me all the

*benefit of their local influence. But this was not the usual attitude of the clerical mind. I must confess I fear of this*



~~historian~~ <sup>historian</sup> almost unwilling to ~~say~~ <sup>record</sup> how far more prevalent has been the opposite action by Christian ministers.

As regards the Church of England, it seems at first enquiry to have been more liberal than the Nonconformist bodies; for I know of no discussions in connection with the Church where women have been so insulted, and browbeaten, and reminded of their Paul-settled place in the Church and the world, as have again and again gone down in my note-book in connection with "Free Churches". But perhaps this may be because the Established Church is so secure in certainty of women's place that it is never called upon to defend the sanctity of its pulpits. "She comes too near who comes to be denied." I do not think any woman has ever asked as yet for admission to Holy Orders in the Church of England!

I sat upon a small Committee that met in Lady Aberdeen's dining-room to organise a great Congress of Women that took place in London in 1899, when a letter was read from the American Organisers asking that a meeting might be arranged to be addressed by "clergy-women." With one accord and voice, just as if they had rehearsed it, the four Bishop's wives sitting round the table, ~~Mrs. Creighton at their head~~, said when they heard this:- "What's a clergywoman?"

However, it cannot <sup>now</sup> be said that the leaders of the



Established Church refuse to allow women to teach upon any subject in any public gathering. On the contrary, ladies are now <sup>actually</sup> ~~usually~~ invited to read papers to the annual Church ~~Conference~~ <sup>gress</sup>. The subjects discussed by this important Convention of clerics and laymen have always included many upon which woman have special interests and knowledge. For instance, in the many years when women still "kept silence" in the Congress, such topics are recorded as being discussed as "Marriage and Divorce;" "Sunday Schools;" "Popular Education;" "Recreations of the People" "The Marriage Laws;" "Funeral Reform;" "Truant Children;" and "The Means of Deepening Spiritual Life." But not one woman gave her opinion on these topics year after year, in any manner.

The innovation, when it came about, of allowing specially qualified women to give their experience on such ~~things~~ <sup>matters</sup>, was characteristic of the old genuine belief ~~that~~ <sup>so to make her voice heard.</sup> that a lady <sup>could not</sup> ~~could not~~ <sup>and would not wish</sup> ~~and would not wish~~ <sup>to speak in public</sup> ~~to speak in public~~. For a series of years, women were invited to send in papers to the Congress, but those papers were always read out by men, the writers sitting by silent.

Miss Octavia Hill was, I think, the first woman thus to speak vicariously. Aided by money supplied chiefly by John Ruskin she had worked a marvellous improvement in certain of the worst slums of London, humanising and reforming their inhabitants in an amazing way. She was invited to explain her methods to the <sup>Church</sup> ~~the~~ Congress, but her paper was read <sup>out</sup> ~~by~~ by a man. Then, in 1875, a paper was contributed by that devoted daughter of the Church, Miss



Charlotte Yonge, the novelist, on "Woman's Work in the Church,"  
"read for her by the Rev. C. Bond."

This innovatory record is ~~was~~ continued <sup>in</sup> 1879, when  
Mrs. Townsend, the founder of the <sup>valuable</sup> ~~valuable~~ organisation for helping  
young <sup>working</sup> women known as "The Girls' Friendly Society" was invited  
to send in a paper on "The Church's Influence over the Young" -  
"read for her by J. Fowler, Esq." Then the next year, 1880,  
Miss Ellice Hopkins was asked to send a paper on "The Best  
Reformatory Methods for Girls" - "read for her by Rev. J. A.  
Faithfull." And so on, *year after year*.

Not till 1886 did the great event occur of a woman in  
her own person being allowed to read a paper before the Church  
Congress!! The lady thus at last permitted "to teach" in the  
clerical and lay assemblage of the Church was Miss Mason, Local  
Government Board Inspector of the arrangements for bringing up  
pauper children; and she spoke on that topic.

In 1889, at Cardiff, a lady took part in one of the dis-  
cussions, and from that year onwards women have not only read  
their own papers, by special invitation, but have taken part in  
discussions on any subjects in which they were interested. In  
some instances, women have presided at the Meetings; this first  
occurred at Shrewsbury in 1896, and next at the London Congress  
in 1899, when ~~Miss G. G. G.~~ <sup>the</sup> wife of the then Bishop of London,  
*actually* presided at a Congress Meeting.

Most of the organised and uncompromising opposition by



clerics to women entering into the preaching profession has been disclosed from the United States; but probably this is because the women of that new and democratic land, women the product of co-education from the primary school upwards, have displayed an audacity, and therefore <sup>have a</sup> needed <sup>necessary</sup> stern repression such as was never found ~~needed~~ for the meeker women of Conservative old England, even in "Free Church" circles.

So early as 1837, the "Congregation<sup>al</sup> Assembly of the State of Massachusetts" found it necessary to issue a "Pastoral Letter" to the local Churches, saying:

"We appreciate the unostentatious prayers and efforts of woman in advancing the cause of religion, and in leading religious enquirers to the pastors for instruction. But when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer we arm ourselves in self-defence against her; she yields up the power which God gave her for her protection, and her character becomes unnatural." [Then of course these Reverend authorities quoted "Scripture."]

Some fifty years later, two women, Miss Anna Shaw and Miss Oliver, both holding theological degrees from American Universities, received a "licence to preach" in the Congregational denomination. But when they had the audacity to proceed further, and <sup>plead</sup> to be received as fully ordained ministers, not only was this refused, but there was taken away from them even that which they had!

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Presbyterianism in America produced <sup>the</sup> most amazing samples recorded in my note-book, of clerical oratory on women as fellow-preachers. So recently as 1877, the Presbytery of New Jersey was called upon to consider the conduct of the Rev. Isaac See, D.D., of Syracuse, N.Y., accused by the Rev. E. Craven as follows:-

"The Rev. Isaac M. See is charged with disobedience to the divinely enacted ordinance in reference to the public speaking of women in Churches, as recorded in I Corinthians, XIV, V.34-35, and I Timothy, II, V.12<sup>11-12</sup>; in that, on Sunday October 29th., he did introduce in the pulpit of his Church, and before the congregation assembled for morning worship, a woman, whom he permitted and encouraged then and there publicly to teach and preach; and again another woman was permitted and encouraged to preach at ~~evening~~ <sup>evening</sup> service on the same day."

The prosecuting Presbyterian parson reminded his brethren that another eminent brother, Rev. Theodore Cuyler, of New York, had been compelled publicly to apologise for inviting a Quaker woman preacher to occupy his pulpit; and in a discourse lasting for four hours, punctuated with sounding whacks of his Bible on the reading desk, Mr. Craven demanded a similar discipline and worse for his Reverend brother Isaac See. Brother Craven said (inter alia) that: -

"He would not affirm that some women could not preach as well as, or better than, some men, but it was expressly forbid-

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den in the passages he had read.. Who would have his own wife stand upon the platform or his own daughter face a mob? Let woman go upon the platform and she loses that shrinking modesty that gives her such power over her children. What child would wish to have a public-speaking mother?" [His oratorical peroration declared - "I believe the subject involves the honour <sup>78</sup> of my God. I believe the subject involves the leadership of Jesus. My argument is that subordination, the subordination of sex, is natural, a divinely arranged subordination of woman as woman to man as man. It is not allowed to women to speak in the Church. Man's place is on the platform. It is positively base for a woman to speak; it is base, an indecency, in the sight of Jehovah!"]

The Presbytery of Newark, N.J. could not withstand such manly eloquence, and Dr. See found not one whole-hearted supporter of his unchristian behaviour. Some brethren lovingly tried, unavailingly, to persuade him to admit the error of his act; and some added other arguments "curioser and curioser" as "Alice" says, to those of Mr. Craven. Thus, the Rev. James Wilson observed that "a woman's voice was against her preaching; a man's words came out with a thud, but a woman spoke soft and pleasing;" while another divine <sup>argued</sup> ~~argued~~ that if a son saw his mother disobeying Scripture by preaching, he would quite inevitably follow her evil example by himself running off and disobeying every commandment in the Decalogue!



~~There~~, The Presbytery of Newark voted censure on Dr. See; and on his appeal successively to the Synod of New Jersey, and to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, he was each time doomed to receive renewed reprobation from the brethren.

The Wesleyan Methodist denomination might have been perhaps expected to show more liberality towards women who believed themselves or were able to give proof that they were specially eloquent and valuable preachers, inasmuch as their eminent founder gave encouragement to women as lay preachers. Dinah Morris was no fiction, but a real character. No doubt John Wesley was led to encourage women to lead religious services by a curious correspondence that he had found amidst his father's papers. [The father of John and Charles and Samuel Wesley was a Church of England clergyman, who had a miserably poor living, with a spiritually dead congregation, in Lincolnshire. Few of the parishoners came to Church even when the Rector himself was there; fewer still during his long and frequent absences in London, attending Convocations and getting his own poems published, while the curate took the duty. During his stay in town in <sup>1712,</sup> 1712 the curate wrote to the Rector complaining that the Rector's wife was actually holding religious services, and preaching on Sundays, in the Rectory barn! The Rector wrote home in a great flurry; and Susannah his wife was compelled to admit the fact. [Her son published, years

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afterwards, the two letters in which this audacious female tried to justify her conduct. <sup>She</sup>pleaded that she had been led by degrees to carry on service for over two hundred, having begun with only her own children, then added the farm servant to her congregation, who asked leave to bring others, and so on, snowball-fashion. She asserted that families who never went to Church came to her Meetings; that the villagers now testified love and gratitude for the privilege; that those who used to play on the Lord's Day now spent it in devotion with her, some coming from the lowest end of the town; and that there were "so many other good consequences of this Meeting that I have not time to mention them." The one thing she was concerned about was "their being present at prayers.. not because so many are there; for those who speak to the great and holy God need not be ashamed to speak before the whole world; but because of my sex, I doubt if it be proper for me to present the prayers of the people to God." She besought her husband, if, after all her pleading, he still resolved to stop her good public work, not merely to tell her that he desired her to abandon it, "for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."



The Rector in reply probably quoted St. Paul's orders to the Greeks of Corinth seventeen centuries earlier. At any rate, he certainly did send his "positive commands", for he silenced the evangelistic work of the woman thus gifted to win souls. Let the worship of God, and brotherly love, and moral reformation all go — the one thing needful is that no woman shall use her mind and voice to bring about such a change of heart in men!

In 1895, the English Wesleyan Methodists held a full-dress debate on whether women should be permitted not to preach, but merely to speak and vote at their annual "Conference". The Rev. Price Hughes, apologetically enough, moved that women should be eligible for election "When in the judgment of any local Synod this would serve the best interests of the Church of God." Opposition was vigorous. One Wesleyan Minister, Rev. Mr. Jenkins, maintained that "the true advance of woman was not in assuming manly duties, but in perfecting womanly qualities" — public speaking, of course, being obviously an exclusively "manly duty." Rev. Mr. Watkins maintained that as women were not allowed to be Members of the Imperial Parliament and discuss the affairs of the Empire, a fortiori they should not be Members of a Wesleyan Methodist Conference. He read a passage from John Bright deprecating the entry of women on political strife, as damaging to their characters; and the Rev. Mr. Watkins urged that they would be still more deleteriously affected by the ecclesiastical strife inherent in joining in the Wesleyan Conference. Again,



such argument prevailed; the Conference shelved the matter, by voting the Previous Question.

But ~~it was~~ <sup>(1926)</sup> to show how even the sacerdotalism of Nonconformity can advance in thirty years, there has been a motion carried in the self-same body that women should be actually "admitted to the Ministry on the same terms as men," except "that the new order of Ministers shall be not only women but Vestal Virgins!" "Marriage in the case of <sup>a</sup> woman shall imply resignation of her ministry!"

What an "except!" To ~~temporarily~~ <sup>minister</sup> order to woman the compulsory choice between a life-long celibacy and the abandonment of a career, presumably selected from a felt <sup>it,</sup> call to <sup>and</sup> capacity for it, and prepared for by a course of study and earnest aspiration, is very far indeed from opening their Ministry to women "on equal terms with men." [This motion that women shall be made to choose between unwilling celibacy and any life work other than kitchen and needle drudgery is the present salient of sex-tyranny in the field of employment. It is being applied by <sup>men</sup> <sup>state & Municipal</sup> upon public bodies to women doctors, teachers and other employees.

I believe that such a handicap on the work of women is everywhere <sup>utterly</sup> mischievous and unfair. [Married life is most decidedly not necessarily passed in Paradise; and perhaps, all things considered, women who want a wide life-career will do best to avoid matrimony if they can. But this is another matter from a worker, because of the female sex, being arbitrarily compelled to choose between



marriage and wider work. This is putting a monstrous penalty on a woman who enters on natural and legal sex relations.

St. Paul has given tersely the arguments for and against marriage as an institution for a public worker, but even he did not apply his persuasion toward celibacy to women alone or even to women especially. He advises celibacy, but leaves the question to individuals to decide for themselves in each case. However, such is the present-day Wesleyan-Methodist male notion of "equal terms for men and women" as preachers.

It is to be noted that every new sect (excepting only Mormonism) that has obtained any considerable hold in Christendom during the past century and more, has been aided to do so by admitting the equality of women. I would name in this category the Catholic Apostolic (Irvingite) Church, the Salvation Army, Theosophy, and Christian Science.

How, I wonder, did Mrs. Catherine Booth and ~~Science~~ Mother Mary Baker G. Eddy get round St. Paul?

Of the older Sects, only the Friends (Quakers) have admitted women to equal platform rights and opportunities. When, very early in my speaking for women's suffrage, I came up against the religious objection to women speaking in public at all, I asked ~~my friend~~ Mrs. Margaret Bright Lucas ~~(a Quaker)~~ how her community dealt with this scriptural stumbling-block? She replied to this effect:—



"Thee errs in supposing that inspiration ended with Paul. He spoke for that time and place, but not for all time and everybody. The Spirit may bid thee proclaim a message, and if so it is thy part to hear and obey. If the way opens before thy steps, and the message fills thy mind, accept it as a call for thee to the platform, *at* this time and place."

From the first, the deepest beliefs of the Quakers compelled the recognition of ~~the~~ equal rights for women to "testify," and to administer the activities of their community. I used in my speeches to appeal to the modern visible results of this measure of sex-equality. In every town there would assuredly be leading Quaker families, and women <sup>of the</sup> "Friends", well-known and deeply respected for their philanthropy and public spirit, combined with success in making happy homes and helping their men-folk to lead <sup>both</sup> honourable <sup>& notably prosperous</sup> private lives. As I would appeal to my audience to realise that such was the proved effect of greater sex equality, I invariably sensed the response I desired, and the lesson went home.

Yet how the prejudice imbibed by ordinary minds from the opinion of the time can dim the light of experience is once again shown by a passage in the biography of Elizabeth Fry in the "Eminent Women Series." The writer cannot conceal from us that her illustrious and admired subject not only was an appointed Ministering Friend, habitually preaching in her own Meeting, but also was wont to address large audiences, some-



times even composed of men only, such as a Committee appointed to <sup>Speak on Prison Reform</sup> hear her by the Corporation of the City of London. <sup>Her</sup> audiences ranged ~~ed~~ from crowned heads and courtiers to the wretched denizens of Newgate. But the biographer felt it necessary (writing in 1884) to apologise for and excuse this unladylike behaviour of her heroine. The writer tells us that:

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"No woman whose judgment is well-balanced, and whose womanly nature is finely strung, but will regard the path to the rostrum with shrinking and dismay!... Either the desire to save and help her fellow-creatures is so strong upon her as to overmaster all fear of man; or else the necessities and claims of near and dear ones lay compulsion upon her to win support for them!"

That the Quaker woman speaker herself did not take this view of her public utterances goes without saying. Mrs. Fry refers to the first invitation that she received to be a Minister as "this great mercy," and only adjures herself in her diary not to allow the interest of the wider life <sup>thus opened</sup> to make her indifferent or neglectful towards her home duties. She says: "This matter (of public speaking) had long been on my mind, long before I married, and once or twice I could hardly refrain," and she had held back only because "I feared to come before I was called." Now that she saw the call in the opportunity, there was no "shrinking and dismay and fear of man!" Her first address outside her own community was made (about 1812) with the Bishop of



Norwich in the chair, and six other Church clergymen on the platform, besides many men "Friends" and other leading dissenters, the subject being founding a branch of the Bible Society. <sup>Her addresses</sup> ~~The address,~~ always, strange though a woman's public speaking was at that time, <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ received with respect and attention. But apparently it never occurred to anybody outside the Society of Friends that her power and influence ought to be regarded as an indication that <sup>some</sup> women had a talent for inspiring and leading by the living voice that it was a duty to exercise and a fault to "bury in a napkin." No: she was "an eccentricity," an exception.

Lord Shaftesbury ("the good Earl") has left on record his admiration for Mrs. Fry as a public speaker. He recognises her "zeal and enthusiasm, regulated but never chilled by good judgment"; he recalls "her simple dignity of demeanour, her singularly musical voice, her easy unaffected language, the fit vehicle of her unfailing good sense." But although "the good Earl" saw the woman thus absolutely fitted for exerting a noble and sweet influence by the use of the living voice and thought on the platform, he still regarded her public speaking as out-of-the-way conduct to be accounted for and excused by her being a Member of the Society of Friends. <sup>He observes:</sup> [ "A little eccentricity of action ~~by a woman~~, was considered permissible, and even natural, in this member of a Body already recognized as eccentric in opinions, eccentric in dress, eccentric in

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language .... the Quaker habit and Quaker renown disarmed hostility".

In the selfsame modern year (1884) as the absurd comment above cited from the Eminent Women Series", an even more preposterous diatribe purporting to be written by a woman was published in The Nineteenth Century. In the March issue of that Magazine is included an Article entitled "Platform Women", by Margaret Lonsdale. It is introduced by a quotation, the following thumbnail sketch from an anonymous poet:--

"Oh, it is not loud tones, and mouthingness,  
'Tis not the arms akimbo, and large strides,  
That make a woman's force".

After this ominous beginning the author propounds her topic:

"There is no doubt a general tendency among women, both in this country and America, towards public speaking. Why is there this tendency, and what is at the bottom of it?"

Of course ~~st Paul~~ the inspired St Paul makes an early entry on the scene. The teaching of religion is so distinctly forbidden to women that Elizabeth Fry and Catherine Booth are clearly in the wrong — chose jugée.

But there still remains the possibility of women using the living voice to influence public opinion about secular matters. The author is sure that women's minds "as part of our physical constitution and dependent upon it are sure to be narrow and mentally warped;" so, obviously, "if we oblige our hearers to take our view of the matter, a warped one-sided view, how do we thereby contribute to the improvement of the world?"

One might suppose that to write a warped Article was as deleterious to the world as to get up and talk silly abuse of your own sex, but there are wider reasons against speaking than against scribbling. There comes forth the familiar argument



that if we desire men to like us and approve of us we must assume the virtue of incapacity to form and express an opinion if we have it not by nature. I will not spoil the delicious quotation from the Article by any further unnecessary comments:-

"Women who are exhibiting themselves, their persons, talents and opinions upon platforms, are necessarily helping to lower the standard of womanhood in the mind of the world at large... for a platform <sup>woman</sup> must strive; she must oppose herself to those who differ from her; she must make herself a very different creature from that which we should ~~possess~~ wish our children to possess as a recollection of their mother! To rub off the bloom, to blow away the aroma... to banish good taste and the appreciation of what is refined, and fitting to a woman's nature; is this to improve the world? We present ourselves before our children as talking-machines, as specimens of what they too may become when, by aid of our example, they shall have rid themselves of all latent feelings of refinement, and quietness, and dislike of being stared ~~at~~ at bodily and spiritually by the multitude, and shall have put on, like their elders, a panoply of self-assertion which gradually thickens and becomes a front of brass. The mental and moral condition which the modern platform woman exhibits is the surest proof of the mischief which public speaking is working, by her agency, on the public at large — the gradual hardening of the countenance, and of the external manner and address, indicating too surely the repression going on within of what is lovable and admirable in a woman. No repose outwardly or mentally is to be found in her society... She produces a strong impression of unnaturalness, and of being in antagonism with the world around her, since her position is not yet, thank Heaven! by any means an assured one... who does not know the shudder with which a sensitive, highly-wrought, fastidious man speaks of those whose persons are continually before the world, whose principles are discussed in half the drawing-rooms of London? 'That dreadful woman' is the mildest term applied to them. And the meaning of it all is that the women who take up a personally prominent position are opposed to the good sense and the refined feelings of the majority, and therefore that female influence in the world is degenerating".

That such illiteracy, illogicality and misrepresentation of living personalities should have found admission to a Magazine with the pretensions of The Nineteenth Century is significant of the prejudice that the early women public speakers had to overcome.



tility."

Early in my self-imposed (or fore-ordained as the case may be) long course of speaking on behalf of Women's Suffrage and equality in the State, I came up against the Pauline objection. Somewhat to my surprise, I found that a considerable number of pious and gentle women actually were afraid of displeasing God by this claim, especially by encouraging a woman to speak. Absolutely irrelevant as it might seem to me to ~~remember recall~~ ~~accept as having validity~~ in our nineteenth century society the orders given by Paul to the Greeks of his day, with their very different social conditions and views in regard to the position of women, I found <sup>this</sup> ~~the dictum of St. Paul~~ was a real stumbling block to others. Of course, a primary essential to effectual propaganda or discussion is to enter into the mind of others, and see if their genuine difficulties can be cleared away: just as the angler selects his bait not according to his own gustatory ~~taste~~ <sup>Desires</sup>, but to those of the fish. I submitted the Pauline sayings to <sup>my own</sup> ~~my~~ private ~~effort~~ exegesis, therefore, and I became convinced that the Apostle need not by any means be considered as <sup>being</sup> ~~an~~ intransigent opponent of feminism, even in the early Church, while he certainly did not allude to <sup>social</sup> ~~our~~ modern ~~social~~ conditions at all.

Yes, I hold that St. Paul is misunderstood! He was animadverting on the general disorder of the Church & its



\* (1)

Meetings at Corinth. He rebuked the undisciplined, noisy, ignorant and self-willed disputations of the men of the Church, and, still more did he object to the idle shrill chatter of the merely silly women who abound all the world over. But he most assuredly did not therefore imply or mean that suitable women were not to be called or allowed to minister; for, on the contrary, <sup>\* 2</sup> he orders that "Every woman that prayeth or prophesieth" is "to wear a covering on her head" while she does so, in obedience no doubt to the custom of the time as a means for distinguishing modest women from their light-living sisters. Could an inspired writer at one moment give directions for the attire of women speaking in public, and at another brusquely and finally order that all women are to be prohibited from so acting at all? For the Apostle tells us himself most explicitly what he means by the word translated into English as "prophecy;" and it is precisely what we mean by preaching. He says <sup>(3)</sup> "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." And he adjures us all to "desire spiritual gifts, but especially that ye may prophecy."

One of his particular and most trusted friends, and the one whom he honoured by being his guest for a long time ("we entered into his house and abode there"), was "Philip the Evangelist; the same man had four daughters, virgins, who did

x<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. v. 17

2 I Corinth. XI, 5-6.

3 I Corinth. XIV, 3.

4 Acts XI, 27.

~~5 Rom. xiv. 1~~



prophecy."<sup>1</sup> No hint is there that Paul told these four sisters to "be silent in the Church!" Again, there is the passage<sup>2</sup> in which he commends "Phoebe our sister" to those whom she was to visit, and requests that they will assist her "in whatsoever business she hath need of you"; Phoebe is, he says "a Minister of the Church at Cenchrea" - for though our translators chose to render the word here as "servant," it is precisely the same as they translate as "Minister" elsewhere.

Above all, there is that ~~striking~~ <sup>striking</sup> record of the great day of Pentecost, when the Spirit descended on all who were in that upper Chamber. It is expressly stated (Acts 1 and 2) that women were given the wonderful gift of tongues on that occasion. The Apostles had "continued in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus;" and when the great moment of universal inspiration arrived, St. Peter himself rose up, and explained their preaching and speaking in all the tongues under Heaven as the Lord's fulfilment of "that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel":- namely: "I will pour out my Spirit, saith God, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy..... and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." X<sup>3</sup>

Finally, there is the famous passage in which St. Paul proclaims the abolition of all privileges of sex, class or race

① Acts XXII. v. 9  
② Rom. XVI. v. 1

X<sup>3</sup> Joel II. v. 28. 29.



*the Christian*  
in religion.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>28</sup>

There was <sup>also amidst us</sup> ~~an~~ influential out-standing and *accepted* exception to the enforcement of the rule of "let the women keep silence:" - Queen Victoria was expected to read her own speeches, to speak in the assemblies of the nation, and in reply to addresses; and she did so always, with a grace of manner, a clearness of enunciation, and a mingled sweetness and power of voice, that were praised and applauded without stint and without reservation by everybody. She was a girl of but eighteen years old when she first met her Privy Council, and therefore had to speak so as to be heard by an assemblage of men, mostly unknown to her personally. Mr. Greville, a surly critic, who was present, said:

"She read her speech in a clear, distinct and audible voice, and without any appearance of fear or embarrassment."

Her Majesty even made open-air speeches on occasion; and her voice "carried" well, and reached thousands. A Crimean Veteran once told me of how she rose in her carriage, and addressed the great gathering of troops returned from the Crimea, in 1856. He said that she spoke for several minutes, and was clearly heard by all the selected officers and men who were in, and by many beyond, the three sides of the large square

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Galatians. III. V. 28.

*run on*



of troops - Her Majesty's carriage and her brilliant staff forming the fourth side. He particularly remembered the wonderful clearness and emphasis, and the thrill it produced, of the following phrase as she spoke it:- "I am proud of the valour of my sailors and soldiers."

I believe that great importance to the progress of women in the nineteenth century belongs to the personality of the woman who sat on the throne of England for sixty-four years, and in this matter of speaking in public especially. It could not but sometimes occur to many people that what a woman in her station could do without loss of dignity or refinement might be permitted to others.

It so happens, indeed, that the Jubilee celebrations of the good Queen's reign gave a great impetus to ordinary *ladies*, *both* aristocratic and middle-class *ones*, ~~ladies~~ presiding ~~and~~ and speaking at Public Meetings. I had the good fortune to suggest in the Ladies' Page of the Illustrated London News, which I was then writing, that women should make a special celebration of the event. The idea was instantly taken up. Committees were formed in every considerable city of our far-flung Empire, and Public Meetings were called, presided over and addressed by the wives of Lord Lieutenants, *by* Mayoresses, and *other* influential ladies, most of whom had ~~never~~ spoken in public before, taught now that they could *so* express themselves by their loyalty and love to their woman Sovereign. The ground thus gained has never been lost.



There is in existence an Act of Parliament passed early in the reign of Queen Mary Tudor setting forth<sup>that:</sup> "Whatsoever the law ~~may~~<sup>doth</sup> appoint or limit for a King is of right due to a Queen Regnant, who has all the prerogatives of her predecessors." The prerogatives and rights of Kings have everywhere, for good or for evil, largely passed from them to the Peoples. Is it not possible for men to recognise the same absolute right of equality for <sup>both sexes</sup> ~~women~~ <sup>the</sup> in all duties, opportunities, and powers of citizens in the democratic State, that this law declares for the Throne?

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