

# THE CATHOLIC CITIZEN

*Organ of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, 55, Berners Street, London, W.1.*

VOL. IV., No. 4.

April 15th, 1918.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

Daughter of the ancient Eve,  
We know the gifts ye gave and give;  
Who knows the gifts which *you* shall give,  
Daughter of the newer Eve?

—Francis Thompson.

## THE STATUS OF THE MARRIED WOMAN IN EARLY ENGLISH TIMES.

BY MAGDALEN MAEVE WEALE.

### PART I.

The question of the position of women in Early English times has been remarkable for the lack of impartial and strictly historical treatment meted out to it. On the one hand, Catholic supporters of women's claims to the full rights and privileges accorded to men adduce as evidence of the Church's sanction of their views such examples as those of Abbesses Hilda and Elflæda, and tell of various dignities granted to women which go far beyond the limits prescribed by St. Paul to their sex when he said: "Let the women learn in silence, with all subjection" (Tim. II. 11). These examples and the conclusion derived therefrom are admitted by even the most ardent opposers of feminism, but they aptly remark that these dignities are given to celibate women, and they triumphantly point to the status of the wife as represented in ecclesiastical codes of law as confirmation of their theory that the Church is in full accord with them in recognising the subservience of women to men. They adduce evidence from St. Paul: "Let the women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. v. 22); they flaunt before our eyes the fact that an old Welsh law allowed a man to beat his wife "if she utter a harsh or disgraceful word." These pieces of evidence are adduced apart from their context or historical surroundings. There is no mention of the fact that the Welsh laws, for an offence similar to that for which the wife might be beaten, exacted a fine from the husband, and for the third offence the restoration of liberty to the wife. There is no mention of the fact that the Code containing

the law brought forward as evidence of the Catholic Church's sanction of the inferiority of the wife to the husband, contains another law justifying divorce and subsequent remarriage; even St. Paul's oft-quoted advice to wives receives so much attention that his admonition to husbands passes unheeded, and the historical significance allowed to such maxims as "Servants, obey your carnal masters with fear and trembling" is refused to those relating to women.

So much for those who search Scripture and Church law and liturgy to glean any evidence, however slight, that would seem, to those who know little of such matters, to prove that the Church is the enemy to Progress and would dim the light of Liberty new-kindled over the face of Europe, and would use Her influence to retard that movement which will enlighten and upraise more than half of the world's population. They do Her grievous harm indeed who would show Her to a world thirsting for light and freedom as the supporter of the reactionary forces and the foe to intellectual development.

On the other hand, the friends of Feminism err in their enthusiasm to secure the Church as their great ally. Christianity, they tell us, is responsible for the uplifting of women in every way. But Christianity, at present, debars women from even the lowest degrees in the ministry of the Altar, and yet, centuries ago, the Greeks had their Pythias. This same want of historical accuracy is apparent in the views advanced by some that the bride's promise to obey is a product of Protestantism,

and was unknown in Catholic England. It is true that post-Reformation Catholic ritual omits this promise and the Protestant service includes it, but this is an instance in which the Protestant service is a truer development of the Old English liturgy.

The truth lies between these two extremes. The Church, apart from definite questions of Faith and morals, shows a liberal and quickening power of development, by which it can keep pace with the progress of the world, or, rather, keep a little in advance of it; it has shown this power and its justification in its attitude towards slavery and war, and it will be seen by the following brief survey of the status of the married woman in Early English times that it still possesses the power of development and will show it to the end.

Many people speak of the Early English period as if it were but one epoch, and refer to "Early English manners and customs" as if they had never altered or improved. As a matter of fact, we can distinguish three periods from the arrival of Hengist and Horsa in the middle of the 5th century until the Norman Conquest:—(1) The Early Saxon period, (2) the Saxon-Danish, and (3) the Saxon-Norman period.

There must necessarily have been much change in social and political views during such a long period of history, and this change is best summed up in the words of Thrupp:—"If, however, we bear in mind that they (the Anglo-Saxons) passed from a state of society in which women were bought by their husbands, and had no legal protection of life or limb, to one in which the sex occupied a position of freedom and security not inferior to that which it enjoys at the present day; from an age when infanticide was lawful and children might be legally sold, to one in which they were nearly as carefully tended as they are now; from a state of barbarism in which domestic servants could be slain at pleasure and when every man had a right to wage private war against whom he pleased, to a period when the lives and property even of slaves were duly protected, and when law and morality had put an end to what was at first a state of incessant bloodshed: it is difficult to comprehend how it can be said that there was not social progress."

It is with the social progress as represented

by the first of these three great tests of civilisation that this paper deals, and our object is to show, in a general way, that throughout the process of development the Church will always be found somewhat in advance of the times, urging her children on to further heights, yet never outstripping them too far or showing to their wearied minds the vast distances yet to be traversed, but leading them gradually from height to height, until, in this twentieth century, the goal of perfect equality is in sight.

When in A.D. 595 St. Augustine visited England and converted Ethelbert, King of Kent, the Catholic faith spread rapidly; but the resultant religion was not pure Christianity in every case, for Bede tells us of a church which contained, besides an altar to Our Lord, a smaller one dedicated to the devils. Pope Gregory the Great had expressed the wish that the temples and forms of religion pertaining to English heathenism should not be destroyed, but applied to Christian purposes. The new converts were not to be asked to give up their institutions and modes of worship, but to change the basis and object of them, and this by a gradual process. This method, the usual one of the Church when dealing with long-standing institutions such as worship, war and slavery, applied also to the marriage laws. For this reason Pope Gregory suspended, for the time being, the restricting of marriage beyond the second degree, whereas hitherto the seventh had been a forbidden degree, and justified his conduct in a letter to Felix, Bishop of Messina, on the ground of expediency.

The status of the married woman may be ascertained by considering (1) the method of obtaining a wife, (2) the rights of the married woman, (3) the marriage ceremonies, (4) the grounds of the dissolution of a marriage.

1. In the earliest times a woman belonged to her father, and in days when the property of others was little respected, the usual method of obtaining a wife was to carry her off by force. Later it was enacted that before having recourse to physical violence the lady should be demanded of her father, and, if refused, then carried off. The pursuing father, if he overtook the fleeing pair, could either fight a battle or come to terms, and as this

(Continued on page 32).

## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

We were glad to see the correspondence in the Catholic press dealing with the discreditable article on "Women" in the Catholic Encyclopedia. The article was severely criticised in the CATHOLIC SUFFRAGIST by the Editor as far back as July, 1916. It was then said, and in this we have no doubt every member of the C.W.S.S. would agree, that it was difficult to understand the state of mind of any man, least of all of a Catholic priest, who could hold the views put forward in that article. The writer, Father Rössler, is imbued with a great idea of the superiority of his sex, and sets out to prove the inferiority of women with a complacent arrogance which would be amusing did we not know the incalculable harm it will do to those who believe that he is interpreting the true mind of the Church.

Father Rössler is an Austrian. We lay stress upon his nationality, because in Austria women are still so kept back that the law forbidding them to hold political meetings, we are told, has not yet been repealed (though women are now defying it). But he gives his case away, as we pointed out in our article, by admitting that no people has ever done full justice to the personal dignity of women, and that Christianity has ever endeavoured to bring about the emancipation of woman, in accordance with the mind of Our Lord, but human passions have stood in the way. He does not realise, of course, that he is among the obstructionists.

We have been asked to repeat the qualification for the parliamentary vote for women. A woman who has reached the age of thirty will have a vote:

a. If she is the occupier either as owner or tenant of a house or flat, or one of two joint occupiers.

b. If she occupies any land or business premises of the annual value of not less than £5 for each occupier.

c. If she rents an unfurnished room, or rooms. According to Miss Chrystal Macmillan's reading of the bill the room or rooms must be of a yearly value of £5, but there

appears to be some doubt as to whether a lodger will not be qualified however low the rent of the room may be.

d. If she is a university graduate. This also applies to Oxford and Cambridge provided she has passed the final examination, and kept the necessary period of residence for a man to obtain a degree.

e. If she is the wife of a man who is a Local Government elector.

f. If she is serving away from home with the Naval or Military Forces, and would otherwise be qualified. The qualifying period in this case being reduced to one month.

The qualifying period for the Spring Register is for the six months ending January 15th, and for the Autumn Register for the six months ending July 15th. The qualifying period for the first Register is from October 16th, 1917, to April 15th, 1918. The new register comes into force on October 1st, 1918. There will be a house to house canvass, and when the list is complete it will be posted up at all churches and chapels, post offices and public buildings from June 15th to June 29th. Every woman who is entitled to a vote should ascertain that her name is on the Register, and if it is not she should apply at once to the Town Clerk. Miss Chrystal Macmillan's pamphlet giving full details of the qualifications for England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland is on sale at the office, 55, Berners Street, W.1., price 3½d. post free.

As we go to press we learn that the War Office, an institution which on some points never learns wisdom, has issued an order under the Defence of the Realm Act, which constitutes a renewal of the C.D. Acts. Since the beginning of the War there has been a duel between the War Office and the women societies upon this point. So far the women have won, and they will win again. Our agitation will continue until such time as the War Office comes to its senses and withdraws the order.

We much regret that we are unable, from lack of space, to report the great meetings which have been held to celebrate the Suffrage victory.

THE CATHOLIC WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETY.

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Hon. Editor . . . . . MISS LEONORA de ALBERTI.  
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Signed articles do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Society.

WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A NATION?

The tardy decision of the military authorities to place the "maisons tolérées" of France out of bounds for British troops is a remarkable tribute to the new power, which has so recently been conferred on the women of this country. For many months now pressure has been brought to bear upon the War Office without avail, until public opinion was roused by the Cayeux scandal; a besmirching of our national honour which the majority of the British people must deeply resent. A formidable phalanx of societies, including the Catholic Woman's Suffrage Society, the Catholic Women's League, and the Catholic Social Guild, declared their readiness to support the Association for Social and Moral Hygiene in a public campaign of protest, and the Government may rest assured that these societies will be again roused to action if the rule is not enforced.

We said last month that we claimed no right to tell our members for which candidates they should cast their vote, nevertheless we wish we had the names of the "honourable" gentlemen who cheered Mr. Macpherson's infamous remark, when the matter was brought up in the House of Commons. Human nature being what it is, said Mr. Macpherson, he did not know that it was such a bad thing to have a certain house where women were registered and kept clean. Men who hold those views are not fit representatives of women.

That is the sort of spirit which is at the root of all the trouble. Many of us would like

to endorse what the Editor of that gallant quarterly, the *Shield*, has said, "We believe that no more sensitive, clean-minded, and honourable Army has ever been seen in the world than the British Army now fighting in Europe. But, owing to the gross materialism and lack of all belief in the finer attributes of their men, which appear to prevail among some competent military authorities, thousands of our soldiers have been deliberately exposed to an utterly demoralising form of temptation." Before the war there were signs that encouraged one to believe that there was a new spirit abroad, a new desire to establish a single code of morality, a new belief that prostitution was not a necessary evil; but the war has powerfully militated against that spirit, and we have seen on the one hand the military authorities providing soldiers with facilities for immorality, and on the other judges condoning the murder of unfaithful wives by their soldier husbands. Mr. Walter Roch said in the House of Commons that the six million women voters would approach this problem from a different standpoint to men. That is indeed true, for the best of men either from a lack of faith in God, or a lack of faith in men, or both, have failed in attacking this evil of prostitution. And so we find men speaking of prostitutes as anything from the priestesses of humanity to the sewers which keep a palace clean. And for centuries good men and women have thought of this problem chiefly in terms of rescue work. That is a

very noble work, but it can never be anything but a tinkering with effects, it does not touch the root of the evil. If we are to deal with the subject at all we must in the first instance awaken in men a sense of their responsibility in this matter. For it is men who create the demand, it is men who have made the market, where women are bought and sold. And if it is true as investigators tell us that the vast majority of girls who adopt this horrible profession do so at a very early age, then a crushing responsibility lies on the shoulders of men.

I therefore earnestly beg of all men and women, whatever their rank or office, who believe prostitution to be a necessary evil, to turn their attention to other matters and leave this problem alone, for the tragic results of such a belief are written in letters of fire on the pages of history, ancient, modern and contemporary.

L. DE ALBERTI.

Office Rent Fund.

I am most grateful to all those who have so generously responded to the appeal on behalf of the Office Rent Fund. I have received £24 13s. 6d. in money and £2 more is promised. One of our members undertook two years ago to send 1/- monthly to this Fund and she has most loyally carried out her promise. I commend her example to others. I am anxious to collect the balance of £13 6s. 6d. as soon as possible and beg of those who have not already subscribed to send me a donation without delay. It is so little that I want and it does so much, it provides for our Office requirements for a year. Please address all donations to:—B. Gadsby, C.W.S.S., 55, Berners Street, W.1.

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Catholic Women's Suffrage Society.

A Drawing-room Meeting of the Society was held on March 23rd, at 40, Lowndes Square (kindly lent by Mrs. Cameron Head), at which Miss Abadam gave a most interesting address upon the New Force, the Hon. Mrs. Walter Roch being in the Chair.

Miss Abadam said that in all the various celebrations of the Suffrage Victory which had hitherto been held, she had noticed one thing to be wanting. No thanks had been offered to Mary, the Mother of God, for her unflinching help, and it was fitting that the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society should be the first to do this. It was well known that where Mary was honoured, there woman was respected too, and it was in Germany, which first cast Mary out of its churches, that women now held a lower place than in any other nation.

Teachers' Protest Meeting at the Albert Hall.

The National Federation of Women Teachers is to be congratulated on the great success of their protest meeting against an unequal rate of payment.

The teachers were supported in their protest by other societies, including the C.W.S.S.

In the course of a very telling speech Mrs. Finlayson Gauld (representing the C.W.S.S.) said that she was surprised that women teachers had not realised their great power before which must ever be greater than that of men. Woman must ever be superior, because she is the producer of the race. Even if women teachers were paid at the same rate as men, it would not be equal pay for equal work, for the woman was endowed with a special gift for teaching. She dwelt on the legacy of freedom we had received from the past and urged those present to work hard to establish the principle of equal pay for equal work, so as to be able to hand it on to those who would take their place to-morrow.

(Continued from page 28).

latter way was often the more satisfactory, especially if the bride were a party to the flight, it became generally adopted as a form of marriage. The agreement generally consisted in the payment of a sum of money by the bridegroom and a promise on his part to treat the lady well. "If a man carry off a maiden by force, let him pay fifty shillings to the owner, and afterwards buy the object of his will of the owner" (Ll. Aethelbirti, 82). Later still, the carrying off became superfluous and the woman was openly bought. "If a man buy a maiden with cattle, let the bargain stand, if it be without guile, etc." (ibid., 77).

It was about this time that Christianity was introduced into England, and the change by which the English woman obtained the right of disposing of herself in marriage was gradual. At first both ecclesiastical and civil law obliged her to accept the husband her father chose for her. Later she could raise an objection to the suitor, but of this objection her father was sole judge; but he was urged to weigh the objection earnestly. If he did not do so, the right of judgment passed to the public tribunals. "Si quis tradiderit filiam suam viro, honestis nuptiis, et amaverit alium, et consentit filiae suae, et acceperit dotem, ambo ab ecclesia excludantur" (Sgn. S. Patr. c. 22). "Quod vult pater, faciat virgo, quia caput mulieris vir. Sed requirenda est a patre voluntas virginis, dum Deus reliquit hominem in manu consilii sui (Sgn. alia S. Patr. c. 27). "Cum de nuptiis puellae quaeritur, nec inter tuorum et matrem et propinquos de eligendo futuro marito convenit, arbitrium Praesidis provinciae necessarium est" (Justin Codex, v. 4).

By the middle of the 10th century the woman had become sole judge of the sufficiency of any objection and so had become her own mistress. The word 'foster-lean' was but the euphemistic term for the 'price' of a bride, and was supposed to represent the expense incurred by the father on property transmitted at the time of marriage to the husband.

The teaching of the ecclesiastical authorities on the subject of second and subsequent marriages affords another instance of a change of opinion and of consequent legislation. The clergy did not actually forbid second

marriages, but disapproved of them: "Nor may any priest be at the marriage anywhere, where a man marries a second wife, or a woman a second husband, nor together bless them, as may be signified to him; so that it were better for them that they continued in chastity. The layman may, however, with the apostle's leave, marry a second time, if his wife desert him; but the canons forbid the blessings thereto, and have established penances for such men to do" (Aelfric. c. 9); and again, "Muliere mortua, licet viro post mensem accipere alteram, post annum vero licet mulieri accipere alterum virum" (quoted by Eggb. Arch. Ebor. Exc. cxviii.).

The following extract from the "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Religious," states clearly the prevalent opinion concerning second marriages:—"By this it may be known, that it is altogether not right that a man take a wife, or a woman a husband oftener than once; or, at all events, it is too frequent, if it take place a third time, and altogether sinfully done, if it take place oftener (xxii.).

If a widow married within the year, she forfeited her dower, which at first passed to her late husband's next of kin, but in Saxon-Norman times to the bishop as reparation for an ecclesiastical offence. In Domesday book, t. 11. f. 199, there is an entry of property which fell to a Bishop Almarus, and the following notice is added: "Quia mulier que tenuit nupsit intra annum p. mortem viri."

2. There can be little doubt that in the earliest times the social status of the married woman was very low, and it is interesting to note, in reference to this, that the habit of wearing the hair long and flowing was typical of freedom and chastity, and that on marriage, or on entering a convent, the hair was cut short like that of a slave, to show that the woman had embraced a life of servitude. Later, instead of cropping the hair, she was allowed to braid it round her head, and when the married state rose to be one of honour, this fashion of wearing the hair became typical of dignity and authority.

On the marriage of a woman, the "mund" or authority of the father passed to her husband, and there is no doubt that in the earliest times a woman was quite subservient to her husband. In the Dimentian Code of Welsh laws, which is founded on the laws of King Howell the Good, which laws were rati-

fied by the then reigning Pope, there occurs the following injunction:—"If a wife utter a harsh or disgraceful word, let her pay to the husband three kine as 'camborw,' for he is her lord, etc."; but these old laws contain provisions for safeguarding the wife's claims to part of the joint property, and the Gwentian Code enacts that there are three things of which a woman is not to be deprived "although she be abandoned for her crime"—her cowyll, or what she receives for her maidenhood (in O.E. morning-gift), for sarand, or compensation for an unmerited beating, and her gowyn, or compensation paid by the husband for his faults. Soames in his "Anglo-Saxon Church" tells us that women were permitted to possess and to dispose of property, and that no person of wealth was allowed to marry among his equals without a legal settlement on his intended wife, and Gale III. Historia Ramesiensis contains the following: "Item quaedam Thirgunt nomine terram permittenti viro suo Thurkillo—in testamento reliquit, etc.," and again, "Terram—quam uxor ejusdem Lenrici, Adelfled nuncupata, antea sibi vendiderit," and an instance of land bought "ab Adulfo et uxore sua Burgflo"; and a case is recorded in which a bishop bought some lands of a husband and wife, and fixed a day when she should come and surrender them, because she had the greater right to the land by a former husband (Gale III.).

It is evident then that women possessed, devised, sold and received property, and Sharon Turner calls our attention to the fact that in Domesday book women appear as tenants in capite.

On her marriage, the English woman received from her father a wedding-gift, called the Fader-fiod, or father's fee. This remained the separate property of the wife. It will be seen from these facts that the old laws regulating the property of married women were far in advance of the conditions that prevailed until quite recent days.

In the earliest period of Anglo-Saxon history a marriage was not fully binding on the bridegroom until the following morning, when he was allowed to ratify it by his presentation of a "morning-gift" to his wife. At first this morning-gift was optional; later it became compulsory, but its value was unde-

termined. At the latest period the amount was always settled before the marriage. It became the separate property of the wife, and was at the full disposal of the widow. A widow who had children was entitled to half her husband's property; if childless, she received nothing; so that it would seem that the half she received was provision for the children and not for herself. The following are the laws of King Ethelbert relating to this subject:—

No. 78. "If she bear a live child, let her have half the property, if the husband die first."

No. 79. "If she wish to go away with her children, let her have half the property."

No. 80. "If the husband wish to have them (let her portion be) as one child."

No. 81. "If she bear no child let her maternal kindred have the 'fioh' and the 'morgen-gyfe.'"

No. 81 shows that, at this early period, on the death of the husband the "mund" reverted to the widow's family. In the time of King Edmund the laws regulating the marriage settlement show improvement from the woman's point of view. These enacted that (1) a man first promise and then give a "wed" to those who are her "foresprecas," or guarantees, and that his friends shall guarantee that he will keep her "as a husband shall his wife"; (2) a wed is to be given for the payment of the foster-lean, and this again to be guaranteed; (3) the bridegroom is to declare "what he will grant her, in case she choose his will, and what he will grant her, if she live longer than he"; (4) if it be so agreed, then is it right that she be entitled to half the property; and to all, if they have children in common, except she again choose a husband. Under Cnut the Great married women acquired the right to have a store-room, a chest and a cupboard of their own, to keep them locked, and to forbid their husbands access thereto. This prevented the abuse by which a wife could be held a party to her husband's theft and sold with him into slavery. "Unless it (the stolen object) has been brought under his wife's key-lockers, let her be clear; for it is her duty to keep the keys of them. . . . If it be brought under any of these, then she is guilty" (Cnutes domas, No. 77).

(To be continued.)

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**LONDON AND BRANCHES.**

Office: 55, Berners Street, W. 1. Hours: 3-30—5-30, Saturdays, 10-30—12-3. Library books 2d. per vol. Holy Mass will be offered for the intentions of the Society on Sunday, May 5th, at 10-30, at St. Patrick's, Soho. Monsignor Browne and the Rev. Canon Brennan have accepted our offer to send lecturers to address the Catholic women of their congregations. Our member, Miss Jameson, has been appointed Joint Hon. Sec. of the Catholic Federation (Haverstock Hill Branch), to assist in the compilation of Register of Women Voters.

**LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT BRANCH.**

A General Meeting will be held at 18, Colquitt Street, about the middle of April. As the date is not finally decided, the announcement will be made in the local papers.

Miss D. M. Hughes, B.A., will read a paper on "What is the use of a vote."

Miss Barry, London Sec., will afterwards address the meeting on "How to get on the Register."

Members are earnestly requested to make an effort to attend, as it is hoped to establish a monthly General Meeting.

**NOTICE TO ADVERTISERS.**

All communications respecting advertisements to be addressed to the MANAGER,

Miss F. L. FULLER,

Tel. 2421 Mayfair. 99, New Bond St., W. 1.

Printed by Wadsworth & Co., The Rydal Press, Keighley.