The Progress of Woman and Christianity.

Thesis for degree of B.D.

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With the star of Bethlehem, which 1601 years ago led the wise men of the East to the manger, rose the star of hope for woman. Well might she have waited then for a brighter day was coming making it possible for her to reach a higher civilization. For the various superstitions and customs of that time had chained woman in darkness so great, that, not a single ray of light pursed the gloom. Man's sphere could widen, he could explore new fields as the ages rolled on, but woman ever trod the same limited space—knowledge was not for her, she seemed born for servitude; but Christianity was the beam of light, hope and civilization to her and therefore it seems proper to follow the progress of woman with the spread of Christianity. The sure, pagan history records the names of a few renowned women, but after all there were only a few isolated cases, and who are they—Cleopatra, Aspasia. But the words of truly noble women are found nearly always in Christian lands. Civilization advances by elevating the general classes.
and if woman is excluded from advancing through incompetency or lack of preparation at half of the human forces while or at least stationary and consequently an impediment to progress. But should woman be an impediment? Has she not intended to bear an equal portion of responsibility with man? From the Bible we learn that God created man "male and female created he them and gave to them dominion over every living thing and this seems to me to imply equal responsibilities. Then again woman was a helpmeet – a meet help – a peer hence an equal. An equal is not bound but has all the freedom of opportunities so woman must have the right to act for herself. Woman's principal work ought to be found in the home where independence is equal, dependence mutual, and obligations reciprocal. To allow a woman – a mother freedom and out of that will come liberty of thought and actions, strength of mind, firmness of will and perfection of body and soul which
will develop themselves in her children; but keep her in bondage and the conditions that spring from a life of bondage will develop in her children. The future men of the nation. It is an old saying, as the women of the nation are, so are the men—her necessary then to have pure, wise and self-reliant women. Women's first duties are to Christ, for it is through his teachings that she was able to arise from her conditions of bondage. Her next work is to educate herself so that she is better able to correct her faults, and do well the work that falls to her. Through proper education she is enabled to give instruction wisely. Even a little instruction given to a child at the proper time is often worth more than a college education. This shows the importance of having wise mothers, when they have the sole care of children during their earlier years. Then every woman should fit herself for some work that would sustain her if necessary. But if she never need to work for a sustenance there is still plenty for her to do. The greatest work is stretching out a hand to the
needy, ministering to the afflicted, and gently helping the downcast sister, despising the sin but loving the sinner for Christ's sake. No one can define a woman's work but herself. Whatever her hand find to do let her do it with her might. That is Christianity that has guided woman to a higher plane and given her grand work to do, may be shown by comparing her position in Christian and Heathen lands. If one looks at the condition of her sisters in the Oriental countries at the present time no change for the better is found, and in many instances misery has increased. In most of the countries it is recognized that "knowledge is power," so woman is kept from gaining even the rudiments of an education. It is even believed that it is only through her husband that she has hope of mortality; and this implies implicit obedience to her husband and a careful watchfulness on her part in order to be able to gratify every whim and caprice of his. If single she is bought and sold without any regard to her feelings, and mothers are often to see their own girl infants pledged on the
streets. But when some ideas of Christianity have crept in among them, these cruel customs are modified and woman elevated.

In the primitive history of some of the heathen nations, woman enjoyed many rights; yet it seems whenever one looks at a heathen nation it is found that whatever be woman's condition in the earlier and simpler life of the people, it became incomparably lower as the nation grew wealthier and more cultivated, and only in the growth of a Christian nation does the position of woman become elevated in proportion to the intellectual progress of the people. So it may truthfully be said that the first upward step taken by woman was through the help of Christianity. As the barbarians and half-civilized societies were influenced by the Christian religion, monogamy being taught; they began to regard marriage in a more sacred light, regarding the marriage vow with greater reverence and keeping it with greater strictness. The influence of Christianity from the beginning tended to make woman in all appropriate things the equal of man, and to throw
he influence into every department of life. Christianity purified the morals of woman and bound her to sacred duties as wife and mother. Pledged her to labor for humanity and every where sought to make her worthy of the homage she began to inspire. It protected woman's rights to property and throughout Europe encouraged the system of dowry which was an important safeguard in the wild age. Family life in those disturbed centuries was first purified by the religion of Christ and from that had sprung whatever of good now exists in European social life. The free marriage and easy divorce, customary during the Middle Ages, were especially restricted by the teachings of the Gospel. For it has been that whatever is stable in the union of husband and wife has been more by Christianity against masculine selfishness and caprice. The steady drift of law and customs concerning woman in Christian lands has always been towards independence, toward equality with man and a portion of high moral and spiritual
influence in the family and social life. The husband's power gradually dwindled to the new spirit and became but a weak authority. Futilage was done away with and his right secured over her personal property. The moral position of woman grew broader and higher and the apostles placed many charitable and spiritual interests in their hands. The Christian religion taught that the rights and responsibilities of man and woman were equal and the tendency in all ages under the teachings of Christ has been toward this ideal, but like his teachings in regard to war and utter unselfishness they must be compromised somewhat to suit the state of the world. Each age will see an approach toward that happy condition where in bound and free male and female, learned and ignorant are one in Him with equal rights and responsibilities. The Teutonic tribes brought a fresh sentiment of respect for woman which was strengthened by the Christian feeling of reverence, but the Teutons measured civil rights and social power according to the physical strength
and this had a tendency to depress her standing in the
countries under Teutonic influences. The peculiarity of the
Feudal family and Chivalry did much for woman and many
of the ideals imbied then have come down to the present day.
As centuries go on the test of advancing civilization in each coun-
try is the advancement in the social, legal and political
position of the weaker sex, but for many, many years the common
law negled the married woman's whole legal being in that
of her husband. "She might be heir to untold wealth, marriage
made her husband legal owner of it all, with unchecked power
over it as well as over her own expenses. She might be a
Minerva of wisdom, but her execution must be obedient to
husband, though he were little above the idiot. She might be
mother of a score of children but he could will them all
away from her control. In short she had full power over
her actions, her property, her earnings and her children."
Some sees the laws did not give woman much protection and
although the lawmakers then tried to do what they considered
right, yet it could scarcely have been expected that they
would succeed in dealing justly with all, for when one class makes
the laws it is natural they should make them from their own
standpoint and the elements not represented cannot expect
legislation to meet its ideas of justice. But as principles of Christ-
ianity permeated the heart, men began to see that even unrep-
resented class had rights and laws were enacted for the benefit
of woman. England and America have taken the lead in pass-
ing suitable laws. In 1695 English law gave to the married woman
disposable use of her property and the acts of 1770 and 1822 appear to
give absolute liberty to the wife of acquiring, holding and dispos-
ing of any property as her separate property. So that now in
Great Britain the wages of the married woman, the profits of literary,
artistic and scientific skill, her deposits in the saving bank,
and any property that is hers at the time of marriage is hers to
use in any way she chooses. America reaches the highest standard taken
in this question. The reform began early in this country at first
principally in the New England States. The first object
second was the independence of wives, who were abandoned by their husbands, considered as convicts. Marriage settlements for the wives separate benefit were recognized. Then the right of disposing of her own property by will was accorded to her, and in some states her estates were exempted from her husband's liabilities. But in 1847 such sweeping laws were passed that she was allowed the control of real and personal property and she was permitted to receive property by gift, grant, devise or bequest. All her earning may be her own property and she can bequeath by will. In 1860-62 married women were allowed to carry on many trades or to perform any labor on their own account and their earnings could be invested for themselves. She could sell or buy real estate and sue or be sued. America may well be proud of her leadership in the work of what Judge Kent says is true, "The woman is the wife of the Christian nation in Europe and of their descendants and colonists in every quarter of the globe is most strikingly displayed in the equality and dignity which their institutions confer upon woman. Even since the rising of the star of Bethlehem woman's sphere of influence has been increasing until today she is found bearing the peril of foreign
counting ministering to the needy and reaching a helping hand to her less fortunate sisters. Many noble women are struggling with all the weight of womanhood and the duties of motherhood to rid the land of intoxicating drinks. Women's efficiency is shown in the management of charities, especially for the young. They conduct most of the orphan asylums, homes for the poor, industrial schools, foundling asylums, and similar charities throughout the U.S. They are found on boards of education, also as teachers in public and private schools, colleges, and universities. It is now almost impossible to find any business in which women are not engaged, and they are filling places hitherto occupied exclusively by men. The fields of literature, journalism, education, the sciences, and the delights of learning are open to them so that they can explore and experiment for themselves. Thus it may be seen that liberty and social advancement have increased much since the beginning of the Christian era. The progress of women since the last century has been almost miraculous which may be shown by the change of opinion during the intervening time. The ideal woman was
represented in Broad St. London by a sign inscribed "The God Woman" with the painting of a woman without a head. I wound a simple joke but yet it contained in a small space the division of many of the great men. For when Lessing said, "The women who think are like men who put on rouge — ridiculous," and Voltaire said, "Ideas are like beards, women and every young man have none," they were simply painted each in his own way his idea of an ideal woman. But vastly different is the ideal woman by writers of the present time. Holland says: "She was my pet. No weakling girl who would surrender will."

And life and reason with her loving heart
To her possessor, no soft clinging thing
She would find breath alone within the arms
Of a strong master, and obediently
Wait on his will in slavish carefulness
No fawning cringing spaniel to attend
His royal pleasure and accounts herself
Rewarded by his pats and pretty words.
But a sound woman, who with insight knew
Lost weight a scheme of life, and planned well,
In womanhood: had spread before her feet
A fine philosophy to guide her steps;
Had won a faith to which her life was fraught
In strict adjustment, brain and heart in man, while
Working in conscious harmony and rhythm
With the great scheme of God's universe
On towards her being's end."

Woman has fought a long and brave battle and has success-
fully reached a position of genuine respect and genuine
consideration. She has faced and overcome bitter prej-
dices; although the world is disposed to make her many
concessions she should advance with caution, so that her
future efforts may eclipse her past ones. The outlook for
the future is encouraging; the sphere of usefulness increas-
ing but, increasing usefulness of woman demands greater
preparations so that she may "act well" her past, then
let such take form:

"Build the more stately mansions of my soul
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low vaulted past,
Let each new templet closer than the last
Shut the from a done more vast
Till thou at length are free
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unceasing sea."