

A Single Moral Standard

(The man who in the course of his public life has initiated more national political issues than any other contemporary American herewith presents his newest. Mr. Bryan does not announce whether it is his purpose to launch a national campaign in behalf of this issue and whether he expects to seek action on the question by the coming Democratic National Convention. He has, however, urged the writing of this principle into the proposed Constitution of the State of Nebraska.)—Editor Collier's Weekly.

As the invitation extended to write an article on the Single Standard of Morality is due to the fact that I brought this matter before the Constitutional Convention of Nebraska, now in session, it may be well to quote here what I said on that occasion and then elaborate the proposition. It reads:

"And, just at this time, when the most corrupting influence ever known in politics is passing out, never to return, woman enters and, adding her conscience to the judgment of man, hastens the triumph of every righteous cause.

"Let me illustrate it as I see it. Suppose two armies of one hundred thousand each are struggling for mastery on a hotly contested battle field, and that, just at the moment when the conflict is at its height, half of the army on one side is drawn away, leaving the field to be defended by the remaining half, would not this increase the chances of victory of the hundred thousand? And suppose that, at the same time, fifty thousand fresh troops came to re-enforce the one hundred thousand? That is what we have today. Just as the debasing power of the saloon is being drawn away from one side, the conscience of woman comes to support every cause that promotes the nation's welfare.

"Our State has done its part—a creditable part—in securing these two reforms. Now, I venture to suggest a step in advance. I would like to see the State of Nebraska raise here the banner of the next great moral reform by writing into the Constitution the single standard of morality. All legislation rests upon a theory, and that theory should be stated in the Constitution. You will necessarily indorse, by implication at least, the single standard or the double standard. I urge the indorsement of the single standard—no segregation of sin, no licensing of vice, the penalties for immorality enforced impartially against the two sexes. That is, in my judgment, to be the next great moral reform, and I hope to see Nebraska lead the fight. The women are here; their consciences will be with us; their influence will help us. How dare we longer discriminate against woman and give to the immoral man a respectability that we deny to her? I beg you to consider whether this is not the time for Nebraska to indorse the single standard of morality. Man and woman will stand side by side before the judgment bar of God; if they must stand on an equality there, we should not give one of them an advantage over the other in the tribunals which man creates."

SOCIAL EVIL HAS NO FINANCIAL BACKING

The tasks of society are successive; the energies of society are continuing. Reforms may be compared to crops. The ground is prepared; the seed is sown; then follows a period of growth, and finally the harvest is ready for the sickle. The earth, the sun, and the moisture are the continuing forces; the crops come annually. So with reforms. During the early years of a reform those who preach it are like "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," but "a truth once uttered can never be recalled." It echoes and echoes until the echo drowns out all other sounds. It is God's way, and we could not worship Him as we do if He had not provided as surely for the triumph of every righteous cause as He has that seedtime and harvest shall follow each other year after year. Is it not time for the energies of society to turn to a new reform?

The overthrow of the saloon would, of itself, have been sufficient to prepare the ground for the reform which we have under consideration since alcohol contributes in many ways to sexual immorality. It unlooses the animal in man, paralyzes the will power, and thus lessens resistance to evil. The saloon was the copartner of every vice and the promoter of every form of sin. It not only emboldened man to assault

woman's virtue, but it used woman to lure the unwary into temptation. If not prevented by law the men engaged in the liquor business would have capitalized the attractiveness of women and made the occupation of barmaid the most remunerative position open to them. The country went more than halfway toward the elimination of the social evil when it banished the drinking place.

But the advent of woman into politics makes the present time even more opportune—in fact, compels society to give attention to an evil that brazenly reduces woman to the basis of the brute and measures her value in physical terms only. In speaking to the members of the Nebraska Constitutional Convention, I made, I repeat, only three applications of the theory upon which I would have them write the Constitution of my State; first, no segregation of sin; second, no licensing of vice; third, the penalties for immorality to be enforced impartially against the two sexes.

The attempt to segregate sin implies a recognition of it as legitimate, and, therefore, legislation permitting it is based upon the theory that there is a double standard of morality, one applicable to man and one to woman. Who would suggest setting apart a district in which stealing or killing would be permitted?

The same is true as to the licensing of this vice, whether the licensing be formal, as in some countries, or implied as in the case of periodical fines which carry with them the promise of immunity for a certain length of time. The public found to its sorrow that the licensing of a saloon was at once seized upon as an evidence of legitimacy, and men engaged in the business indignantly protested against interference with a "business recognized by law." The fight against sexual sins will be much easier than the fight against the saloon, because there are no vast combinations of capital ready to furnish an unlimited corruption fund. The social evil has no considerable financial backing; the supporters of a single standard of morality cannot be black-listed, browbeaten, and driven out of politics by rich and powerful organizations. Then, too, in the social evil each single act is a sin, while it was not a single drink, but the drink habit, that aroused opposition.

It will be comparatively easy to eradicate entirely every semblance of legality and make the social evil a vagabond.

The larger task will be to correct the inequalities in the law and put man and woman upon the same level in the matter of punishment. I speak now of the punishments enforced by the law, but they will increasingly influence public sentiment, which has heretofore made glaring discriminations between the sexes. It is when one comes to examine the penalties for immorality that he recognizes how clearly they conform to the double standard theory. Three illustrations will suffice.

In one of the States the law, until a few years ago, permitted a husband to obtain a divorce upon proof of a single violation of the marriage vow, while a wife was compelled to prove habitual violation on the part of the husband. The law now accords equal rights.

In the matter of bastardy the penalty exacted of the man is usually insignificant as compared with the penalty enforced against the woman. As a rule, the man escapes upon the payment of a few dollars, while the woman must raise the child and suffer social ostracism.

The age of consent is another illustration. In many States it has been raised within the last few years, in one, where it still remains at fourteen, I found that the woman must be twenty-one in order to make a valid deed to real estate. That is, she can barter away a priceless virtue when she is fourteen, but she must be seven years older before she is considered mature enough to convey a piece of stumpy land. If our laws are written upon the theory that men and women must live up to the same standard of morality, the penalty for sexual sins will be enforced with impartiality against the sexes. This is not only a matter of justice, but it will be of incalculable value in the way of education.

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

However, in every moral movement, law follows rather than precedes public opinion. When public opinion has reached a point where it can compel legislation, its further progress is ac-

celerated by the influence which law exerts, but there must be education before law is possible, and a rapid development of public opinion along this line is probable.

Science will greatly aid in this new crusade; it will reach some who will not be open to religious appeals. The investigations are now sufficiently complete to remove every excuse that has been made for immorality, and to support warnings so terrible that no man capable of reasoning can disregard them. The study of eugenics—a comparatively recent science—will support the Bible declaration that the sins of the father are visited upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation. However harsh this law of nature may seem to be, it cannot be violated with impunity. But who will bring an indictment against it when he understands how necessary it is to strengthen man against overpowering temptation? If one is indifferent to himself, he may hesitate to afflict those whom he loves better than his own life. And it must be remembered that the same law that visits sin upon descendants gives us assurance that righteousness may be bequeathed from generation to generation. "The right of a child to be well-born" is thus doubly secured. The pure blood of a virtuous parentage is a richer inheritance than royalty or lands.

GLORIOUS PERIOD IN HISTORY

The church will naturally lead in this reform, for the Bible speaks in no uncertain terms on this great subject. The Master protested with an emphasis unequalled by anyone before or since against the discrimination then existing—and still existing—against women: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," is a ringing challenge to that spirit of injustice which stones the women to death while it excuses the man.

It was Christ, too, who went to the root of the whole matter when He exposed the beginning of sin. "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." While the church will avail itself of all arguments, scientific as well as economic, its strongest appeal will be to the conscience. It will apply the law of service and use the power to love. While it holds up before the woman the ideal of perfect purity, it will force man to consider the unspeakable selfishness of one who, for a moment's fleeting pleasure, will blast a human life and drag down to the bottomless pit one made in the image of the Creator.

What a glorious period in which to live! Schoolboys are wont to look back to some Golden Age of the past and express regret that they did not live their brief span in those days. There has been no Golden Age like the one in which we live—no time when the average ideal was so high and the average purpose so exalted. In no former time were the opportunities for service so numerous and so large. The United States is blessed above all other nations of the earth in the courage which its people possess to undertake great things. Never since history began to record the doings of man have the people won at the polls such a moral victory as our nation won when the saloon was banished from the land. No where have women ever exerted the influence they have in the United States, and that influence will be increased in the immediate future. On no other subject has man so cruelly misused woman; at no other time does he show such a contempt for her higher qualities. Here, surely, is a cause in which every woman will be proud to enlist, and she may hope to call to her side all the men—most of them coerced into active cooperation by conscience, the remainder shamed out of opposition to her plea for justice.

W. J. BRYAN.

The retailers continue to assert through the newspapers their earnest desire that prices to consumers be lowered. They are like the automobile man, aghast at having run over a pedestrian, who said, when asked why he did not stop when he saw the man ahead of him, that he never thought of it. Perhaps the retailers never thought of reducing prices to their customers as one way of getting reduced prices for consumers.

Sugar prices continue to hover about the 18 to 25 cents a pound average, notwithstanding the fact that a determined effort has been made in various quarters to force the profiteers to have mercy on the consuming public. The profiteers manage to keep the price away up, possibly on the theory that revenge is sweet.