

## WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

(Paper read by Mrs J. Voss, at a meeting of the Spreydon Branch of the W.C.T.U., Christchurch.)

Whenever we survey the galleries of the Gentile world, the one spot absent to the modern eye is the woman's Empire at home. In India, woman was, and in most cases still is, a prisoner. In Japan she was, and still is, not the mistress of the home, but simply a housekeeper. In China she was, and still continues to be, subordinate to man; for there the relation of father and son precedes that of mother and daughter. In the palmiest days of old Rome, she was but a possession of a man just like a piece of furniture. In Greece she rose sometimes to distinction, but not as mistress of the house.

But amid the galleries of the Ancient World, there is one where woman's portraits are unique; it is that of the Bible. The triumph and the merit of this Book are that, at a time when woman was practically a slave, it painted a gallery in which she was free. Here we find womanhood rejoicing in the freeing of her shackles; and in exalting woman, Christianity as embodied in the New Testament has transformed the ideal of human greatness, not by adding a new ideal but by dethroning the old one.

The woman's charter was the Sermon on the Mount. It elevated what had previously been condemned. Its paradox is, not that womanly qualities have received the favour of God, but that they have received the favour of man. The teaching of the beatitudes that Christ pronounces on feminine virtues is that woman shall become one of the dominant factors in human development, shall guide the policy of nations and become the standard not only for woman, but also for man.

In the short time at my disposal, I can refer only briefly to the characteristics of the principal women mentioned in the New Testament. I take it for granted that the Biblical accounts of these women are fairly well-known to those present. For that reason, I think it better to refer to them as influencing present-day thoughts and organizations.

For some years I was a member of a Sewing Guild or Dorcas Society,

which devoted its energies to make up garments for Herrick's Home and similar Benevolent Institutions in and around Christchurch. What is the origin of the name "Dorcas Society?" We find the answer in the New Testament (Acts 9:36): There was at Joppa a certain disciple called Tabitha or Dorcas, a woman skilled in needlework and the head of a sisterhood of mercy, the precursor of many Benevolent Dorcas Societies and Guilds of the present day, helping the widows, the fatherless, the poor and the needy, abounding in good works of every kind. Dorcas and her fellow-workers gave not merely their sympathy to those in distress, but also, through goodness of heart, rendered practical assistance, and, in blessing others, they were blessed themselves. What a fine example for us to imitate! May we endeavour to be as full of good works and almsdeeds as Dorcas was!

How often we hear the expression, "The Widow's Mite." Whence is it derived? Read Mark 12 and we soon discover its origin. The crowd descending from the Temple no doubt presented a grand spectacle. Attracted by national memories and hopes still centred there, the people give freely to the Treasury from patriotic as well as from religious motives. Amongst the rich givers, appears one doubly poor by reason of her widowhood and lack of means; yet doubtless she had learned the Compassion of our Lord, and had therefore worshipped with content and gratitude, which was expressed in the only material offering possible to her. Unnoticed by others, she is seen, appreciated and commended by Christ. "She, of her want, did cast in all that she had," so says the Scripture. She did not give merely what she thought she could spare; she gave all, poor as she was. Her contribution was the greatest sacrifice of all, therefore the most valued. No wonder her example has been held up before the world, and is recognised to-day as the truest type of Christian giving.

Paul, Barnabas, and other apostles found it easiest to make proselytes of women. Thus, when Paul was in Macedonia, preaching on the Sabbath by the riverside, he spoke to the women assembled there. Amongst them was Lydia, one of a Corporation of purple sellers who listened to the

earnest words of the preacher with looks and tears that told of deep emotion, and who thereby became possessed of the consciousness of a new life. When she was baptized with her household, she showed large-hearted hospitality in offering to receive the preachers into her home as her guests. In this respect, Lydia was a type of those devout women who, in our day, entertain the preachers of the Gospel. Thus, women were the Agents, as it were, of the Christian missions of our Lord's time. From being agents, the devout women have developed by different stages until these modern times when we have our deaconesses, women missionaries, lecturers and preachers.

As to the question of the human nativity of Jesus, controversy has raged and is raging still; but we will pass that over to ask what was the particular work which Mary, the Mother of Jesus, had to do for her Son. We commonly say that it is the mother's province to train her child for Heaven; but in this case, the Child Himself was from Heaven. Should she not, then, be really guided by Him? I think it must be conceded that her mission was, not the guidance of his spiritual, but of his outward or physical nature. She was not to stimulate the higher, but to prevent that higher life from making Him forget his lower needs. There had been committed to her care a great trust, the preservation of a gifted Son for a heavenly mission. The greatest danger his early years had to encounter came from that very mission. He was or might be so absorbed in it that He was in peril of losing sight of his earthly existence and of his physical needs. Mary's whole thought was to give Him strength of body to prepare Him for the toil of mind. She was proud of her son. His wisdom and learning were the admiration of all. He had been spoken of everywhere as the Coming Man, the Coming King, the One Who was to signalize the next generation. But the existence of the soul requires in a human being a body, so a guardian must be found for the wants of the human Christ. The Heavenly Father provided for the divine Christ; someone must provide for the Man Jesus; that mission fell to Mary. We have often lamented the meagreness of the records of