

SUBMISSION, OR EQUALITY?

The Christian Union of September 17, in noticing the article in the Woman's Journal of the 13th entitled "The Way to Peace," says: The Christian Union goes farther than Lavinia Goodell in the 'Woman's Journal' asks it to go. For we exhort husbands "to recognize the equal rights of wives, and defer to their wishes and judgment in matters" not only "pertaining peculiarly to their sphere," but in all matters of importance to the common welfare. Nevertheless, we also exhort the wife to submit herself to her husband rather than have strife with him; and if Miss Goodell will study these two exhortations a little carefully she will discover there is not the least inconsistency between them.

Suppose a mother, in sending her children out to play, should say, "Now, Johnny, remember that Sister Mary's rights are equal to yours, and that you should defer to her wishes in all things; but, Mary, if Johnny shouldn't do so, but should insist upon having his way every time you disagree, you'd better submit to him, rather than have strife;" what would be the probable result? Wouldn't Johnny feel encouraged to tyrannize? ' And wouldn't Mary feel that it became her, as a "good little girl," to submit? Suppose the mother further explained to the children that when two or more persons associated together it was necessary that one should be the final arbiter to decide all controverted questions, that the arbiter should always be the same one, and should decide every question whatever upon which there was a disagreement, whether relating to his special department or that of the other; and that in case of association between a brother and sister, the brother should always be the one to decide, even though the sister might be the wisest and best; that, to be sure, good little boys would always consult their sisters' wishes, and do all they could to please them; but that whether they did so or not, the good little girl would always submit to her brother, rather than have strife with him. Wouldn't Johnny grow strong willed, selfish and arbitrary, and Mary weak, servile and deceitful, under such teaching?"

It is a poor rule that doesn't work both ways. " Would the Christian Union recommend the husband to submit himself to his wife rather than have strife with her, because "almost any error will bring less suffering upon a household, and less evil upon the children, than perpetual conflict between husband and wife?"

If not, why not? After telling a woman that it is her duty to submit to her husband, under any circumstances, "rather than have strife with him," it is a poor substitute for justice to exhort the husband to use his alleged rightful authority leniently, and defer to the wishes of his wife as far as in him lies. "The liberties of a people," says Blackstone, "depend not so much upon the gracious behavior as upon the limited power of the sovereign." Give a man the legal right, and teach him that he has also a moral right to decide every question of the matrimonial partnership, and that it is the duty of his wife to submit "rather than have strife," and you put in the man's hand a power with which no man ought to be entrusted, and which nine out of ten will abuse, Teach him, on the contrary, that his wife is his equal, give her equal power with him; let her decide the questions pertaining to her "sphere," and he those pertaining to his, after mutual consultation and deference to each other, and the happiness and well being of both, and of the family, will be increased an hundred fold; even as now domestic happiness is far greater in civilization, where there is a nearer approach toward equality, than in barbarism, where the wife is reduced to a mere object state of submission."

Almost any error will bring less suffering upon a household, and less evil upon the children," than the habitual submission of the wife to the husband. What is the result of such habitual yielding of the will and judgment upon the character of the person thus yielding? Let science answer.

Dr. W. B. Carpenter, in his work on "Mental Physiology," speaking of the tendency to hysteria, says: "We here see the importance of the self-determining power of the will, which, if duly exercised, can substitute a healthful direction of the mental activity for the morbid imaginings to which the patient has previously yielded, herself." In a note Dr. Carpenter explains the use of the feminine pronoun, thus: "This condition is by no means peculiar to females; although, from the greater impressibility of the nervous system, and the lower development of volitional power, by which the sex is ordinarily characterized, it is more common among them than in males." "The lower development of the volitional power," one of the fruits of "submission," thus results in hysteria, and other morbid mental states, sometimes terminating in insanity. "It is, in fact, in virtue of the will," says Dr. Carpenter, "that we are not mere thinking automata, mere puppets, to be pulled by suggesting strings, capable of being played upon by every one who shall have made himself master of our springs of action. It may be freely admitted, however, that such thinking automata do exist; for there are many individuals whose will has never been called into due exercise, and who gradually or almost entirely lose the power of exerting it, becoming the mere creatures of habit and impulse."

In the chapter on "Common Sense," Dr. Carpenter says that common sense is most deficient in those whose minds have not been "duly trained in that volitional exercise which, when it once comes to be habitual, is performed with so slight an effort that it is scarcely perceptible even to ourselves. Slight as this effort may be, however, it is the one thing needful; and it may be unhesitatingly laid down that if the directing power of the Will be entirely suspended, the capability of correcting the most illusory ideas by an appeal to Common Sense is for the time annihilated." [The italics are Dr. Carpenter's, so are the capitals.] Dr. J. D. Morell, in his Introduction to Mental Philosophy, says: "The education of the will is really of far greater importance, as shaping the destiny of the individual, than that of the intellect." Dr. J. M. Fothergill in an article in the Popular Science Monthly for March, 1875, says: "There are two other mental attitudes which are not directly associated with bodily disease, but which exercise so distinct an influence over physical conditions, especially in sickness, that they may not improperly be considered here. . . . One is that condition of mental impairment in which the intellect becomes servile. It is usually shown by elderly people, who are utterly dependent on the bounty and therefore on the will of others. That such a condition of helpless submission should obtain under these circumstances, and especially in women, is readily to be conceived. The utter helplessness and entire abolition of self-confidence so induced, have a most pernicious effect upon the mental processes; the intellect of such persons becomes restricted, and solely directed toward observing, and accommodating itself to the varying moods and passing caprices of those upon whom they depended. Chameleon like, they change color with every new shade of opinion with which they come in contact, until at last they lose their individuality altogether. The mental condition of these unhappy beings is pitiable in the extreme; there is a paralysis of all volition. Everywhere and ever "to be weak is to be miserable," and cunning is the only refuge of the feeble.

Has not the criticism of Woman ever been that she is weak, irresolute, hysterical, lacking in self-control, self-confidence, reason and sound judgment; variable, artful, narrow, and subject to "morbid imaginings?" And now science explains the reason of this in the fact of the subjection of her will to man's, which, in so many cases, has proved her mental and moral ruin. Is it best, "for the sake of peace," that women should give to their children such mothers? Let us have no more of this barbarous teaching! The woman who always "submits," rather than have strife, in so doing sins against God, wrongs the community, and defrauds her children of their rightful heritage, in thus dwarfing her mental and moral

nature, by yielding into the hands of another the will which was given to her keeping, and which will one day be required of her "with usury."

Lavinia Goodell. Janesville, Wis., Sept. 23, 1879.