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F E M A L E

INFLUENCE AND OBLIGATIONS.

BY REV. NATHAN S. S. BEMAN, D. D.

“THE extent of female influence, and the importance of exerting it in favor of Christianity,” are subjects which, perhaps, have never, as yet, powerfully arrested the attention, or deeply impressed the hearts of Christians. Much has been said, and much written, on the moral power exerted upon the world by female character and conduct; but these themes have been more frequently associated with poetry and fiction, than with religion and eternity. The interests of Christianity and the world require that this subject should be presented to the female mind in the simple light of fact and the Bible; and that WOMAN, who has, to say the least, her full share, under God, in moulding the destinies of the world, should understand the extent of her influence, and feel her consequent responsibility; and thus be prepared to call forth her own appropriate powers in serving God and doing good to his fallen creatures.

As to *the extent of female influence* in our world, it is beyond computation immense. It is often less noisy and imposing than that of the other sex, and for this reason has sometimes been overlooked; but it is always pervading and powerful. In all civilized countries it is an influence which reaches the deep and secret springs of human action; and not unfrequently brings about great and decisive changes in

the sentiments, the morals, and the happiness of the community, by means the most simple and natural, but which are hidden from an ordinary eye. It is an influence everywhere exerted. Its boundaries are those of the earth, and its duration can be measured only by eternity. This fact ought to be known and felt; it ought to be written, in all its length and breadth, on the female heart. Till this fact is known and felt, females can never be prepared, in the best and highest sense, either to live or die; can never be qualified to discharge, on the most elevated principles and to the fullest effect, their duties either to God or man. On this point, let females peruse, with deep and prayerful attention, the following remarks.

The influence of your sex exerts itself over *the earliest periods of rational life*. The first being that the child knows is its mother. To the young heart, the mother is the first object of affection and reverence. Her eye and voice, her tears and smiles, her caresses and reproofs, are the subjects of infant observation; and these present the earliest lesson that the young immortal ever learns. From the very nature of the case, mothers must impress their own image upon their children. The feelings, passions, and expressions of the mother, will become imperceptibly, and almost necessarily, the feelings, passions, and expressions of the child. To mothers, more than to any other human beings, is committed the important business of moulding the intellect and heart of every successive generation. This talent God himself has lodged with you that are mothers; and it is a talent which cannot be wrapped "in a napkin," or buried "in the earth," with impunity. How full of interest is the thought, that the infant who lies in the cradle, or in its mother's arms, is now receiving the outlines which may form the character of the future man or woman! Life or death may be conveyed in the earliest accents which are remembered

from maternal lips. The pious mother may put forth an influence which, blessed of God, may save her child. The mother who is living without God, and without a Scriptural hope, though her example may not be that of direct and positive irreligion, may put forth an influence which will destroy the soul of that *little one* who is thrown, helpless and ignorant, upon her care and instruction. If females were all Christians, and such Christians as they ought to be, a hope might be cherished that the world would soon be converted. The next generation might live in a new earth, and, as a part of their employment, celebrate the final victories of the cross.

Female influence is great in *the family circle*. It always has been so, and it always will be so. In countries blessed by civilization and Christianity, the wife and mother is a kind of presiding spirit in the sanctuary of domestic life. Her influence, of whatever character it may be, whether malignant or benign, spreads itself over the habitation, and takes deep and fast hold on the sentiments, the interests, and the hearts of this little community. Children, whether young or old, do not easily forget their mother. To trample on her authority, to thwart her wishes, to sport with her tears, and to grieve her spirit, must always cause many a pang on the part of her offspring. Before her influence can be annihilated, the ties of nature must be sundered, and the last amiable sensibility be obliterated from the heart. The wife, too, in all ordinary circumstances, must exert an influence over the husband. She is his chosen companion. Her dominion is the fireside and the family circle. The early instruction of the children, the regulation of the domestics, and the entire policy of the household are committed to her. The order, the moral habits, the piety, and the happiness of families, are more emphatically under the control of females than they are of the other sex. While

the husband and the father is pursuing his business abroad, the wife and mother is, perhaps, imparting a cast of character to those around her at home, which may extend through many generations; which will continue, either in dark or splendid lines, when our world shall be burned up, and the sun and stars shall have gone out. It will always depend much on female influence, whether religion shall be admitted into the family, or whether the door shall be shut against its entrance; whether "the curse of the Lord" shall be there, as it is "in the house of the wicked," or his blessing, as it is "in the habitation of the just." Prov. 3 : 33.

Females exert a vast moral influence upon *society at large*. It is not your province to fill the chair of state, to plan in the cabinet, or to execute in the field; but there is no department of human life, and no corner of the world, where your influence is not felt. To say nothing of the indirect control which females often have over the great movements of society, by that influence which they possess with their husbands and sons, with their brothers and other family connections, look at the ordinary scenes of social life; at the popular opinions and prevailing amusements of the world; and it must be seen, that they are intrusted with a moral power that hardly knows a limit. The practical virtue of the world, the tone of piety in the church, and the salvation of souls, are probably more affected by the current maxims and amusements of the day, than by either the form or administration of civil government. And here female power is great indeed. In morals and religion, and in every thing with which morals and religion stand directly connected, your sex may do as much good or hurt, as men ordinarily effect in the politics and government of the world. What man would be a *drunkard*, if he were sure to receive universal female reprobation? What man would fight a *duel*, if the united female voice were to cry

out *murder* upon the shameful deed? How long would the amusements of the theatre continue to corrupt our large cities, if no female would appear upon the stage, nor on any occasion, take her seat in this great temple of vice? How long would the ballroom be crowded, and gay, and extravagant, and dissipating parties maintain an existence, if every female were to set her face against them, and resolve to go to no place where the voice of Christ and duty did not call her? If the whole female world were to revere the Sabbath, and were found in the house of God on this sacred day, what a happy revolution would soon be effected! The kingdom of God would come. The blessed reign of Christ would be established on the earth.

Females have it in their power to do much good among *the children of affliction*. Sin has rendered our world the abode of deep and dreadful suffering. The marks of God's displeasure may be everywhere seen. Disease, and poverty, and death, are moving on in their melancholy course, and making the earth desolate. It is the business of the philanthropist and the Christian to diminish the amount of human misery. If we would act for God and eternity, much of the employment of life must consist in relieving the wants of the needy, in administering to the sick, in imparting consolation to the afflicted, and in drying up the mourner's tears. And to these works of beneficence females are peculiarly adapted. Your native sympathies are cast into the proper mould for this sacred business. You easily enter into the interests and sorrows of others. Your social temperament disposes you to "weep with them that weep." You can often find admission, too, where the other sex would be excluded; and your entire habits of life prepare you to enter the scene of domestic affliction with the best prospects of doing good. Here, every power and every affection may find ample scope. In the house of poverty

you may light up a blessed smile. In the chamber of disease, and by the pillow of death, the pious female is mercy's angel. In these scenes she may become the Saviour's advocate. Here, amidst groans, and wretchedness, and tears, the Holy Spirit may bless her efforts, and impress heaven's image on the heart.

Sabbath-schools open a broad and delightful field for the exercise of female talents and virtues. These seminaries are making a new experiment of moral power and gospel truth upon the world. In their efforts to diffuse light and save the soul, we have a new and most interesting interpretation of the divine command to "preach the Gospel to every creature." Here the scheme of redeeming grace is brought down to the capacities of children, and the great truths of the Bible are made to operate upon the juvenile and infant mind. And for this labor of love, females are peculiarly fitted. You may here, under God, train up children for heaven. The little ones whom you take by the hand and instruct, and for whom you pray, are some of them without a mother to teach them or to pray for them; and not a few have mothers whose entire example and influence are enlisted for their temporal and eternal ruin. What an office of mercy, like that of guardian angels, is it to throw yourselves between these little immortals and destruction! With the spirit of your Master—a spirit which is never more lovely or efficient than when it warms the hearts and inspires the exertions of females—you may here diffuse an influence which will tell upon the records of other generations; you may accomplish purposes of mercy which will receive their proper distinction on the annals of eternity. A vast amount of the good which *Sabbath-schools* are destined to bring about, must depend on female effort; and a portion of this good can be done by none but your sex. You are the very persons to collect the little female

wanderers into Sabbath-schools, and there, under your instructions, may be commenced and deepened, impressions which will make both earth and heaven glad.

This influence of females in our world imposes a responsibility deep and fearful; and motives of no ordinary character call upon your sex to exert it IN FAVOR OF CHRISTIANITY. To do this is *a duty which you owe to God*. His hand made you, and continues to sustain you. Year after year, in this dying world, it has held you up from the grave, and preserved you from falling into everlasting ruin. All your rich and distinguishing privileges are his gift. Every talent intrusted to your care is the property of your Maker, God. He formed your intellect and strung your heart. He has opened before you, in this world of effort and of hope, a broad field of usefulness, and directed you to enter and labor for him. Yes, the command of Almighty God is on you. And this command is of no doubtful character; it is of no difficult interpretation. The God that made you, and bestowed upon you all your capacities for serving him and doing good, requires your hearts and lives. He enforces his claims by all the authority of his eternal Godhead. Here, then, settle this simple question; whether you will obey God or not. Before you rise from the perusal of this Tract, make the determination to devote your whole self to the cause of Jesus Christ; your time, your talents, your influence, your prayers, and your efforts; bring them all, as the widow did her "two mites," and cast them into the treasury of the Lord. Or, if you will not do this, then remember, that you are God's creature, that you live in this world, and that you must soon die; and remember, that you may not cherish a Christian hope while you are living and dying with the claims of God uncanceled, and the command of God disobeyed.

Let females reflect on *the guilt which they incur by*

refusing to exert their influence in favor of the Christian religion. Let them seriously consider *whose authority* they reject and contemn, when they do nothing to honor Christ and save souls; and when, perhaps, they do much to dishonor the former, and destroy the latter—when, in fact, they neglect their *own* souls and the souls of *others*. It is the authority of the everlasting God. Oh, what an act of high-handed rebellion is here! A female setting her God at defiance! And remember, God has bestowed upon you powers and opportunities of *achieving much*. He has exalted you in the family circle, has thrown the entire infant world into your arms for moral training, given you a vast control over the virtues and vices of society, opened before you the habitations of poverty, disease, and death, and invited you to enter and do good; and if these interests are disregarded, if this trust is betrayed, guilt of a crimson stain must be incurred. If properly seen and felt, this guilt would be indeed appalling here; but its true character will never be known till it is looked upon in the light of eternity. It will then be seen, that “where much is given, much is required;” and that guilt and punishment will be proportioned to the talents and influence which have been possessed and abused. It will then be seen, too, that you are chargeable with the loss of that good which you might have secured by embarking in the great interests of Christ’s kingdom. And do you ask the amount of this good, in order to finish the picture of your guilt? This can never be ascertained till we obtain facts from the records of another world. But should the soul of your husband, your child, or your neighbor, perish for the want of that Christian influence which you might have exerted—and who will dare to say that this may not be the case?—what guilt would be yours! Think of this—a soul irrecoverably and eternally lost through your neglect! And instead of *one* soul, it may

be *many*. Can the female heart reflect on these things, and not be moved? Oh, while you read, resolve, by the help of God, to consecrate your soul, with all its living energies, to the kingdom of Jesus Christ and the interests of a perishing world. Let your *own* heart be right with God, and then you may do good to others.

But if the fear of incurring guilt cannot induce you to devote your influence to the cause of Jesus Christ, then let the consideration of *the actual good you may accomplish* find its way to your heart. You live in a world of means; and God himself is bringing about his great purposes by the use of means; by the instrumentality of human influence and of human action. He is employing men and women as his instruments to reform and save their fellow-beings. The work of preaching the Gospel is committed to *men*; but this is only one wheel in the vast and mighty machine which is radically to change the character, feelings, and habits of the world. In the gospel kingdom much is to be done; and the exertions of pious females have always been attended by the blessing of Heaven. God has given you influence for this very purpose, that you might exert it for his glory and the good of others.

But do you ask what good you *can* do? The answer is easy. Much is to be done; so much, that your last talent is needed, your last effort is called for in the kingdom of Christ. Lift up your eyes and look upon the world, and let the surrounding scene affect your heart. What untold miseries are to be relieved; what inveterate vices are to be rooted out; what profound ignorance is to be instructed; what scarlet abominations are to be met with a decided frown; what Christian virtues are to be trained and cultivated; what enterprises of heavenly charity are to be enlarged, perfected, and sustained; and what an unnumbered multitude of immortal souls are to be saved from hell, and

fitted for heaven! Some of this work is committed exclusively to female hands; and much more might be accomplished by female effort, if your entire influence were made to bear upon the moral interests of the world. Let every female who reads this Tract—looking to God for the aid of his Holy Spirit—resolve that she will, from this moment, do every thing in her power to give success to the Gospel, and to save souls; and what might not be done? The church would put on her beautiful garments, the earth would feel the sacred impulse, and the angels would come down from heaven to rejoice. You have influence at home and abroad, over your own sex, and through the various circles of human life; and if this influence were exerted to the utmost, every power called into action, and every resource laid under contribution; if you were to act with the judgment-bar before your eyes, and with the joys and woes of eternity pressing upon your hearts, you would prevent an amount of misery which no arithmetic could compute; you would accomplish an amount of good which would become one of the themes of the everlasting song.

Should these motives prove ineffectual, then let females reflect on *the evils which must be the consequence of refusing* to enlist their influence in favor of the Gospel. You are placed in a situation where you must act. You must be the friends or the enemies of God. You might as soon renounce your *existence* as your influence. If it is not exerted for Christ, it must be enlisted against him. If you do no good, you will accomplish much evil. And in such a world as this, it is much easier to do evil than to do good. A bad example, and perverted influence, fall in with the natural current of the heart and world, and, on this principle, a small effort may do great mischief. It is easier to destroy a hundred souls than to save one. What, then, must be the consequences of enlisting your example and

influence against the cause of Jesus Christ? This is the true state of the case; for "those who are not *for* Christ, are *against* him." Look into your own families, and abroad in society; look down the track of future generations, and along the dread current pursued by the ever-rolling and unwasting ages of eternity, and read the dark history of your present doings! You refuse to exert the influence which God has given you for the glory of his Son who died for you, and for the good of souls who are perishing around you. Nay, more; you neglect your own salvation, and use your influence against God, and Christ, and souls. And what is the consequence? You are giving a downward impulse to a world already groaning under the curse of Heaven. You are confirming many of your own sex in irreligion, and fastening the bands of death upon them. You are giving a moral tone to a generation who will rise up and rebel against God. You are increasing the gayety, the pleasures, and the dissipations of society, and thus shutting Christ, as far as in you lies, from a thousand houses, and grieving the Holy Spirit from ten thousand hearts. You are opening channels which are every day filling with troubled waters. You are swelling that stream which bears upon its dark bosom the souls of your fellow-beings to an eternal hell. And if without religion, you are floating along to the same world of sin and woe.

If all this is not enough, then let *gratitude to Jesus Christ* induce you to employ your influence in his service. He has conferred blessings upon you which deserve a grateful return. Some of these blessings are common to both sexes, and call for a common expression of gratitude from all those who live under the light of the Gospel; others are peculiar to your sex, and demand special gratitude from every female heart, and special effort from every female hand. In common with others, you are indebted to Jesus

Christ for the only true light that shines upon this dark world. For you, as well as others, he taught and labored, wept and prayed, groaned and died. His atonement has opened, in this ruined world, the only door of hope. Without Jesus Christ, you must have been a wanderer in life, a victim of despair in the hour of death, and an outcast from heaven in eternity. There *could* have been no alternative. But the Gospel has bestowed many blessings which are peculiar to your sex. In the present world, it is your best friend; among men, your most successful advocate. Where Jesus Christ and his Gospel are not known, women are ignorant and debased, and almost, if not altogether, slaves. They are depressed by the hand of a rough and unsparing despotism. Look at the females of Turkey, of India, and of our western wilderness. It is so in every land where the light of revelation has not come; and it always has been so in every age of the world. For the females of Christendom the Son of God has done every thing. He has called you forth from obscurity, and lifted you up from degradation. And now you are called upon for your grateful tribute; and this should be nothing less than the consecration of your heart and life to Christ. Oh, let not the hand of a female ever be lifted to smite the Saviour's cheek, or employed to plait a crown of thorns for his brow! A female *infidel* is a monster in the human form. A female, too, who rejects the Gospel, and remains impenitent, and will not have Jesus Christ to reign over her, is guilty of most flagrant ingratitude. No wonder that women were among the most ardent and active of Christ's followers while here on earth; no wonder they stood weeping by the cross, when even the apostles themselves were scattered like sheep; no wonder that his very sepulchre was dear to their hearts, for his coming published a jubilee to the female world. Female reader, will you not here fall at the feet of

Jesus Christ, and lift your eyes, streaming with the tears of gratitude, to heaven, and cry, "Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do?"

The last consideration which will here be urged is, that *the present state of the world is favorable* to female effort. Pious women have always done much in the kingdom of Christ. They followed the Son of God, and ministered to his necessities, while here below. In the days of the apostles, honorable mention is made of their activity and usefulness in the church of God. Indeed, in every age, the progress of the Gospel has been essentially aided by their pious and devoted labors. Who can compute, this side of heaven, the influence of Hannah More in favor of the Gospel? When will the name of Harriet Newell be forgotten in the East, or cease to be associated, through the world, with the labor, and toils, and triumphs of the missionary cause? How many will find eternal rest in heaven through the beneficence of a Norris, or the piety and prayers of an Isabella Graham! Those who have gone before you, have done much; but, by the grace of God, still more may be accomplished by female effort.

There never has been a day, since the Gospel commenced its blessed career, when the exertions of females were more needed by the church, or when their influence could accomplish more good in the world, than the present. Every benevolent enterprise under heaven must be affected by the course which you pursue. If you turn away from Jesus Christ, and resist his claims, and cast your influence into the opposite scale, the great work of bringing the world to the foot of the cross must, at least for a time, and in no inconsiderable measure, languish. If this influence is called forth, and made to act in a proper direction, God's providence and grace may enable you to touch every spring, and give motion to every wheel, in that great machine which is

to change the moral state of the world. And there is nothing that stands in the way of successful action. Public sentiment is in favor of female zeal and effort. Numbers of your sex have already done much, and their praise is in the churches. The treasury of almost every Christian institution is deeply indebted to the beneficence and activity of females. But oh, what vast multitudes in gospel lands, some in the church, and still greater numbers out of the church, have, as yet, done nothing! They have never put their hand to the great work for which they were made. But how can the female heart refuse? God has spread the world before you as the field of effort, and the spirit of the age invites you to enter. The signs of the times indicate your solemn duty, and in the discharge of this duty you have the promise and presence of God to sustain you. The eyes of the world—and, perhaps, of more worlds than one—are turned upon your sex. The ministers of the Gospel are expecting much of you; the church are placing great dependence upon the continued and increasing efforts of those who have already enlisted in the cause of Heaven, and are looking forward with fond hopes to a vast accession of female influence; and even the distant heathen, who have learned enough of themselves and their present condition to begin to feel their own necessities, are stretching out their supplicating hands to you.

Here, then, with life and eternity before you, make your final decision. Come around the cross, as pious women did when the Saviour hung upon it; hasten to the sepulchre, to embalm, not the *body*, but the *memory* of the Son of God; with melting hearts and flowing tears, take your places, where Mary sat, “at the feet of Jesus;” commit the entire energies of your souls to the influence and motions of that Spirit which will lead you to follow Christ, and minister to him of your “substance:” do these things, and effects the

most cheering and triumphant must follow. You can do more to encourage the hearts and strengthen the hands of ministers; more in your closets to call down, in answer to prayer, the blessing of God upon a bleeding and dying world; more to train up the infant and rising race for heaven; more to stay the burning tide of ruin which sets strong towards the regions of death and darkness; more to regenerate the world, and to rob Satan of his anticipated prey, than the combinations of earth and hell, with all their weapons of unholy war, and with all their deep-rooted enmity against God, can counteract or undo. You may here plant, and water, and train the flowers of another Eden; and, by the blessing of God, which is pledged to attend your sacrifices and efforts, you may cast around the earth the sweetest smile of Heaven.

NOTE.—A premium of fifty dollars, proposed by a benevolent individual, was awarded to the author of this Tract.

EVERY pious mother may exert upon her child a most controlling influence. Years need not dislodge her hold upon him. She can keep that hold in spite of a thousand things in his conduct that shall grieve her; can keep it when he is in the ball-chamber, and when at the card-table, and when mingling in the pollutions of the theatre; when he has a family of his own, and when far removed from her; when lost and gone from hope, and prayer, and promise. The mother of John Newton, how desperate was the grapple she took of his conscience! She held it when he had reached manhood; when his conduct was dark, and his habits vitiated, and all hope abandoned; when his character was lost, and his occupation lawless, and friends and helpers removed; and when his spirit was hardened almost to the

obduracy of a devil. Blessed mother, how much joy she now has in that son, while she reclines with him on the banks of the river of life, and listens while he rehearses the history of his long-protracted degradation, and his subsequent recovery, and ministry, and redemption.

And not mothers merely, for woman's influence can be mighty in all the relations. A good minister of Christ relates of himself the following fact: He was about to misspend the Sabbath in a ride of pleasure. A pious sister had watched his movements, and, as he was going out, met him in the door, and begged him *not to go*, as it would offend the Lord. But he would go. "Well, brother," said she, "be back early, as I shall spend the time of your absence in my closet, supplicating your forgiveness." He set out; but conviction had seized him, and his misery obliged him to return soon. He searched for his sister, and found her on her knees, and kneeled by her, and prayed and wept with her. Her influence saved her brother. We have read of Sabbath-school girls that brought their fathers to prayer; of the little captive maid that served in the house of Naaman the leper, captain of the host of Syria, who told him of the prophet that was in the land of Israel, and thus introduced heavenly light into Syria; of Abigail, whose wisdom saved her husband and her house; of Hannah, who reared for God the ablest of all the prophets; of the Shunamite, who had a chamber built for Elisha on the wall; and of thousands more, who have poured their kindly influence upon a lost world, and have gone to the general assembly of the church of the first-born in heaven.