

## AN ORGAN AND A REFORM.

"THE Pagan Review" is the alarming title of a new British magazine, which entered on its career of devastation in September. It is not very much to look at, and offers for the customary shilling but sixty-four smallish pages, with no cover to speak of: what engine of reform has not been hampered by mundane limitations at the start? Its title is the fiercest part of it: the contents are rather suggestive than directly polemic, and the "Foreword" admits that "the religion of our forefathers . . . is still fruitful of vast good"—though these their children have got beyond it. The contributors (it is noticeable that there is as yet no lady among them) are united by a strongly romantic and dramatic tendency; the renascence whereof they are apostles is poetical and untheological. The tone is that of lusty and restless youth, which would fain kick over the traces and disport itself in unhampered freedom. As one of them says, "We ought to have been born gypsies." They remind one a little of newly admitted collegians just released from their mammas, anxious to be men at once and to see Life. Their present object is chivalric; they aim at the emancipation of Woman, at her elevation. Let her henceforth be as tall, as athletic, as ratiocinative as the male human animal. Let noxious restraints of tradition and convention be swept away. Give her her rights and an equal chance; let all years be leap-years. Let it be no longer true that

Man's love is of man's life a thing apart;  
'Tis woman's whole existence.

Since the dominant note of Nature is the sexual, let girls and boys be free to rush into each other's arms, and let us who are older give the most of our time and minds to noting how they do it. The proper study of mankind is womankind; or, as the able Pagan editor puts it, "The supreme interest of Man is—Woman," and *vice versa*.

But here two questions obtrude themselves—impolitely, it may be, but irresistibly. Was it worth while to devote a whole new magazine, with much blowing of horns and waving of banners, especially to the illustration of these doctrines? And why "pagan"? Are love-stories, not to say Seventh-Commandment novels, necessarily and distinctively anti-Christian? The eminent Mr. Blank, and the thrilling Miss Whatsername, and the delightful Lady T'Other, have been at this business for years. We have all read their improving romances with more or less sympathy and profit. Are we pagans for doing so? Are they pagans for having written them? They would repel the vile impeachment with indignant scorn; and so say we all of us—or, at least, the great majority. We claim to be merely human in our writing and our reading. Again, why "Pagan"? Why not rather "The Human Review," or "The Human Magazine,"—since it is no more of a review than we are, or our esteemed and highly popular cotemporaries in New York?

Again, is there anything very new in this? Scarcely, except an exaggerated youthfulness, a going on tiptoe as it were, with looks of proud defiance, and accompaniment of horns and banners as aforesaid. It is as if, to an assembly where low-necked dresses were not unknown, should enter one loudly

announcing, "See how very *décolletée* I am! And in spite of you prudens and prigs, I mean to maintain this startling innovation, however you may cry Shame!"

#### AN ANTI-ETHICAL CRUSADE.

It may be that the lines of assault on Faith are shifting. The neo-pagan movement in England (whatever it amounts to) is no more theological than the neo-Christian movement in France. The "Pagan Review" cares no more for the arguments of Colonel Ingersoll than for those of Paine or Voltaire. Now theology has so long been a house divided against itself that interest in its controversies has greatly dwindled: this generation, rightly or wrongly, cares far less for abstract theories than for practical results. But the moral teachings of the Gospel are more revered, more firmly intrenched, than ever. In this sense the civilized world has an Established Religion. Whether they accept them with the heart or not, decent people are generally agreed to regard these ideas as essential to human welfare. Hypocrisy is the prudent homage which Vice pays to Virtue, and those who secretly break the law still profess that the law is good. Even those of superior pretensions—the "emancipated," the agnostics—would subscribe to Paley's doctrine, that Religion is an excellent auxiliary to the police. Take away its restraints, and what is ahead? So far as we can judge, anarchy and chaos, the Parisian commune and the dynamiters.

Transcendental matters aside, that effect of Christianity which has most impressed the general imagination is its power of restraining human passions and indulgences—lust, cruelty, rapine, and the like. It led the Roman emperors to give up their harems, and made comparatively chaste men of Valens and Theodosius—which Gibbon thought was a mistake: he was one of your pagans, and frank in expressing his opinion. It moved a multitude of hermits to turn their backs on a society which seemed to them hopelessly bad. In later days it mastered the love of revenge, the thirst for blood, and drove in its obvious lesson of humanity—slowly, but effectually. It has taught some to keep their hands out of their neighbors' pockets. At least in individual cases, it has checked jealousy, envy, backbiting; the Sewing Society may still talk scandal, but less malignantly than did the ladies of Alexandria and Antioch two thousand years ago. Christian ethics, by common consent, have had the chief hand in making life and property safe, and society decorous and comparatively pure.

Paganism, old or new, attacks this principle at the root. It says, "Be a healthy animal. Don't resist a natural appetite. If you want a thing, reach out and take it. Let yourself go."

We have seen what comes of that. We may see it any day still; and the result is not usually happy. But why confine the application to a single passion? Why not say, "Don't check any impulse, be it greed or hate or whatever. If you want your neighbor's property, or his life, reach out and take it. Be the free, natural man."

They have not come to that yet—unless the anarchists. But it would be logical.

Gentlemen Pagans, it will not do. Without self-control, self-restraint, self-repression, there is no character for yourselves nor safety for the community. Constitutional liberty is not unlimited license. In conduct and in art there had best be restraints, moral limitations.

## ARE WOMEN FREE AND EQUAL?

And yet one is inclined, if not in duty bound, to sympathize more or less with any movement or argument that looks toward improved conditions or larger opportunities for the sex. The position of Woman, the estimation in which she is held, the degree of equality with Man to which she is admitted, are vital notes of difference between Christendom and Islam, between civilization and barbarism, between the modern and the ancient world. It may be claimed that the battle has already been fought and won; but this is true only in part. It is true that many restrictions have been removed, that most occupations have been already opened to women, and that the barriers which remain are mainly kept up by themselves—*e.g.*, when most of them wish to vote, they will doubtless be allowed to. It is also entirely true that among intelligent Anglo-Saxons, and especially with the well-to-do, women are better off than they ever were before, or are anywhere else on earth. They have more freedom, more honor, more power—sometimes more than they are fit for, or know how to make good use of. Of course this goes further with us than in England. In circles pretending to, or approximating, wealth, fashion, and culture, the American woman is a queen—if she cares to be and has it in her; the American girl is petted, flattered, coddled, and indulged to the top of her bent. It is they that have the good times, that get the cream of life. Husbands and fathers toil for returns of cash, that daughters and wives may spend freely and beautify themselves at ease. Their feminine charm is a unique distinction; in society, sometimes even in open-minded literature, they receive a deference, a homage, which are not extended to senators and sages.

If this be so, what more can they want? What more can the philanthropist ask on their behalf? Why, say the serious sisters, to be taken seriously; to be something more than ornaments, elegant playthings, or at best mere housekeepers and mothers. The surface is not the whole of life, nor Epicureanism its only philosophy. We want our identity respected; and that is just what you have not done yet. We claim to be ourselves, and not merely your hangers-on and decorated servitors. Beneath all your courtesies and pamperings lingers the notion that we exist not for ourselves, but for you; that we are really your inferiors, your thralls, your puppets, and your creatures.

The serious sisters are quite right in their complaint; and so, at bottom, are the young Pagan gentlemen who take up their case—though these latter do not put the case very clearly, nor contemplate it from the most desirable point of view. Mr. Haggard, in one of his thrilling African romances, makes a native remark, “We worship our wives, but we have to *hot-pot* them now and then”—which meant (if the reader has forgotten his “She”) to “remove” them by violent means. A belief in this right still lurks, with other remnants of feudalism, in many masculine minds. The nobleman of a few centuries ago, on occasion of domestic mistrust, would calmly wall up his suspected spouse in the masonry; his successor, who resorts to the simpler method of pistol, knife, or axe, is commonly found a little lower in the social scale. In these Russian judgments it is not necessary for the victim to have done anything amiss, but only for jealousy or wrath to be roused in the ruling and punishing mind. The offence may be purely subjective, and is handled much as on Mr. Legree’s plantation forty or fifty years ago. Such cases come to light daily: in one of the latest, milord prepared his serf for cremation, and had applied the match before

the neighbors came to the rescue. Frequently the oppressed takes refuge at her father's, and rashly declines to return to her lord when he gets out of jail or over his debauch; then his vengeance is as summary, and his conscience as undoubting in its exercise, as if he were an Assyrian monarch and she a revolted town. The case was put in a nutshell by that intending citizen who complained indignantly that this was no free country if a man was restricted in the lawful enjoyment of beating his own wife.

This theory of marital rights has been curiously extended by the young men who shoot girls for refusing to marry them. The idea evidently is that the weaker vessel has no right to a mind or will of her own: what is she, to say No to any chance comer of the superior sex who honors her by wishing to be her "master"? Such presumption is treason, sacrilege, and blasphemy, justly open to condign and even to capital punishment on the spot.

It will not do to claim that these illustrations of mediæval tenets are all furnished by recent immigrants. That class indeed supplies more than its share to the work of our criminal courts; but a census of nationalities might leave a humiliating proportion to the native account. It is more plausible to assign the wife-beatings, the woman-shootings, the crude domestic tyrannies and tragedies, to the ranks of "labor" and illiteracy *in toto*; yet even this may be too sweeping. True, "gentlemen" usually adjust their difficulties with ladies in milder fashion; but the polish which education and society afford does not always go deep, and your millionaire may be no less an antique conservative than your mill-hand. A modern rationalist, scratched by the sharp point of some sudden exigency, may appear inwardly hide-bound by antique conventions. His theology—or lack of it—is brand-new, but his social and conjugal ethics are those of the sixteenth century. His wife is better than his horse or dog, and as his wife is entitled to high respect; but, after all, she is only his moon, shining with reflected light. Let orbits get out of order, and she is liable to be bent or broken on the hard angles of his egoism. For men are egoists, and women are generally yielding: under the conditions which prevail everywhere to date, they usually have to be, and their tact teaches them to accept the inevitable.

To a fair mind talk about the inferiority of women is distasteful, because, true or false, it all goes to confirm an ancient prejudice. Miss Seawell's argument against the creative faculty in her sex seems to make for no end but this: fogies read it, or the title of it—which is just as good for their purpose—and cry, "Ah, you see! One of the most brilliant of the sisterhood admits the charge." For one person of either sex who is able and willing to think the matter out, twenty—or fifty—have their minds made up already. The time has not come for a judgment, for the evidence is not all in; on the contrary, decades and generations—to put it most moderately—must pass before we have facts enough to base a verdict on. You cannot fairly compare one race, or class, or order, or set of people with another unless the two have had similar opportunities; and when were women ever on a par with men in position, education, privileges, and responsibilities? The inequality is beginning to disappear in some respects, and to be mitigated in others; but this is only the work of our time, and it is handicapped by the tradition of ages. How are women themselves to throw off at once the inherited notion of their essential inferiority, dominant from time immemorial in their minds as well as in those of men? Such legacies are not only discouraging, they are benumbing. As well (to be

uncomplimentary, and cite a much darker case) expect the African race to rise to anything notable in a year or a century, after being kept in savagery or slavery since "Cursed be Canaan."

The one point which is positively clear and indisputably settled in the comparison of the sexes is that men are generally bigger and stronger than women. This physical fact went for everything at the start, and long after: it will probably go for much in the remote future. It made man the head of the house, the promoter and carrier-on of business public and private: it put him in front, and there he stayed. As he awoke to the consciousness that he had a soul as well as a body, he naturally assumed to be also superior in brain and will; and his wife, being in his power and (so far as we know) of a gentler nature, did not contest the point. She had her children, her humble cares and yet humbler virtues, with the occasional caresses and qualified approval of her lord. As the race progressed toward civilization, she was admitted to be capable of good looks, good manners, domestic thrift, taste in dress, the more highly prized ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and the crowning grace of adoring obedience. When the arts and sciences were invented, she had no part in them, with rare exceptions like Sappho and Hypatia, who doubtless were generally accounted impertinent hussies and no better than they should be. During the Middle Ages a woman had no chance to do anything unless she was a queen or something of the kind. As the free modern spirit came in, a few ventured to roll their fingers with pen or brush, amid the frowns of their brothers and the whispers of their feminine friends. If they were wise, they hid behind a male relative, like Fanny Mendelssohn and Dora Wordsworth, rather than be "unsexed." Others in England, France, and afterwards Germany, rashly let their work be known as theirs. Some of these, as Mme. de Staël, Mrs. Somerville, George Sand, Mrs. Browning, and George Eliot, were thought to have done very creditable work—for women—though nothing original, nothing "creative," of course; how should they?

Remembering that men not yet gray have seen the colleges opened to women, with nearly all the professions beyond those of school-marm, seamstress, and saleslady, is it not rather too early to determine finally what are their meagre abilities and large limitations? Give them a chance to get used to their new and partial enfranchisement, to practise their untried powers awhile, to throw off the long burden of contempt, disparagement, and repression; and then—perhaps within a century or two—they will show us what they can or cannot do. I do not know that they will develop powers of ratiocination, of initiation, of practicality, of creation (if there be any such power vouchsafed to mortals), equal to those of men. Very likely not; but let us wait and see. What is the use of passing snap-judgment on a work not only unfinished but barely begun? Why mistake appearances or probabilities for certainties, and pretend to know what we don't know?

Therefore some qualified sympathy may be extended to the alleged cause of the "Pagan Review," though cumbered with dubious if not malodorous adjuncts. It is harder pulling the boat of social reform in England than here, and probably the neo-pagans will do as much as may be expected of them if they can get the terms of punishment extended for bricklayers who jump on their wives' heads with heavy hobnailed shoes. It really ought to be more than three months for murder of this sort, or ten days when the victim is not quite killed.

*Frederic M. Bird.*