THE NEW TESTAMENT.

“Great is Truth, and mighty above all things.”—I Esd.as, iv., 41.

DOES the New Testament bring promises of new dignity and of larger liberties for woman? When thinking women make any criticisms on their degraded position in the Bible, Christians point to her exaltation in the New Testament, as if, under their religion, woman really does occupy a higher position than under the Jewish dispensation. While there are grand types of women presented under both religions, there is no difference in the general estimate of the sex. In fact, her inferior position is more clearly and emphatically set forth by the Apostles than by the Prophets and the Patriarchs. There are no such specific directions for woman’s subordination in the Pentateuch as in the Epistles.

We are told that the whole sex was highly honored in Mary being the mother of Jesus. Surely a wise and virtuous son is more indebted to his mother than she is to him, and is honored only by reflecting her superior characteristics. Why the founders of the Christian religion did not improvise an earthly Father as well as an earthly Mother does not clearly appear. The questionable position of Joseph is unsatisfactory. As Mary belonged to the Jewish aristocracy, she should have had a husband of the same rank. If a Heavenly Father was necessary, why not a Heavenly Mother? If an earthly Mother was admirable, why not an earthly Father? The Jewish idea that Jesus was born according to natural law is more rational than is the Christian record of the immaculate conception by the Holy Ghost, the third person of the Trinity. These Biblical mysteries and inconsistencies are a great strain on the credulity of the ordinary mind.

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Jesus was the great leading Radical of his age. Everything that he was and said and did alienated and angered the Conservatives, those that represented and stood for the established order of what they believed to be the fixed and final revelation of God. Is it any wonder that they procured his death? They had no power to put him to death themselves, and so they stirred the suspicions of the Roman authorities.

We owe the conquest of Christianity to two things. First, to Paul. Christianity never would have been anything but a little Jewish sect if it had not been for Paul. And the other thing is—what? The conquest over death. It was the abounding belief of the disciples that Jesus was alive, their leader still, though in the invisible, which made them laugh in the face of death, which made them fearless in the presence of the lions in the arena, which made them seek for the honor and glory of martyrdom, and which gave them such conquest over all fear, all sorrow, all toil, as can come only to those who believe that this life is merely a training school, that death is nothing but a doorway and that it leads out into the eternal glories and grandeur beyond.

I think that the doctrine of the Virgin birth as something higher, sweeter, nobler than ordinary motherhood, is a slur on all the natural motherhood of the world. I believe that millions of children have been as immaculately conceived, as purely born, as was the Nazarene. Why not? Out of this doctrine, and that which is akin to it, have sprung all the monasteries and the nunneries of the world, which have disgraced and distorted and demoralized manhood and womanhood for a thousand years. I place beside the false, monkish, unnatural claim of the Immaculate Conception my mother, who was as holy in her motherhood as was Mary herself.

Another suggestion. This thought of Jesus as the second person of an inconceivable trinity, a being neither of heaven nor earth, but between the two; a being having two natures and one will; a being who was ignorant as a man, and who suffered as a man, while he knew everything as God and could not suffer as God—this conception is part of a scheme of the universe which represents humanity as ruined and lost and hopeless, God as unjust, and man as looking
only to a fearful judgment in the ages that are to be. I believe that thousands of people have lived since the time of Jesus as good, as tender, as loving, as true, as faithful, as he. There is no more mystery in the one case than in the other, for it is all mystery. Old Father Taylor, the famous Methodist Bethel preacher in Boston, was a Perfectionist, and when he was asked if he thought anybody had since lived who was as good as Jesus, he said: "Yes; millions of them." This is Methodist authority.

What made Jesus the power he was of his time? In the first place, there was an inexplicable charm about his personality which drew all the common people to him, as iron filings are drawn by a magnet. He loved the people, who instinctively felt it, and loved him. Then there was his intellectual power of speech. Most of the sayings of Jesus are not original in the sense that nobody else ever uttered any similar truths before. Confucius, six thousand years before Jesus, gave utterance to the Golden Rule. And then there was the pity, the sympathy, the tenderness of the man. And then he had trust in God—a trust in the simple Fatherhood of God, that never could be shaken. Jesus taught us, as no one else has ever done it, the humanness of God and the divineness of man, so that, standing there eighteen hundred years ago, he has naturally and infallibly attracted the eyes, the thought, the love, the reverence of the world.

When it is dark in the morning, and before the sun rises, there are high peaks that catch the far-off rays and begin to glow, while the rest of the world still lies in shadow. So there are mountainous men, not supernatural, but as natural as the mountains and the sun—mountainous men who catch the light before our common eyes on the plains and in the valleys can see it, who see and proclaim from their lofty heights far-off visions of truth and beauty that we as yet cannot discern.

Anon.