

THE WIFE AND MOTHER IN THE HOME

By
REV. F. K.
BAKER

ACCORDING to one of the Biblical writers "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord." This statement, though coming from a very wise man, needs to be modified somewhat. We are certainly not to understand that every man who gets a wife gets a "good thing." If this is the universal rule then tell me who so many benedicts seek to be separated from their wives? Is it because they don't know a "good thing" when they find it? If the "favor of the Lord" is the evidence that a man's wife is a blessing to him, then it is evident many men made a bad bargain when they found a wife, for they seem to have everything else but the "favor of the Lord." This same Biblical writer makes clear to us, in another place, that he had in mind a certain kind of a wife, for he says, "A prudent wife is from the Lord." Then follows a description or character sketch of this "prudent" or ideal wife.

"Who can find a virtuous woman, for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. Strength and honor are her clothing. She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband, also, and he praiseth her. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but of women that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

If this is the kind of a woman a man finds for his wife we can readily see why the wise writer should say he "findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord." Here, then, Solomon has painted for all time a golden picture of the virtuous woman in her manifold and fruitful domestic activities.

While the husband and father has his duty and influence in making home all that it should be, the fact remains that the wife and mother is accorded the honored place and position of undisputed

queen of the home kingdom. She has most to do with making of the home life. The husband and father may measure up to the highest ideals of character, yet if his wife is not noble and womanly and in every sense of the word a helpmeet, the home life will be marred, its beauty scarred and its symmetry destroyed. With the queen of the home rests largely the happiness of the home and the safety and training of the hearts that nestle there. At home men find either their greatest help or their greatest hindrance to success in their calling in life.

Much that has been said about the duties of the husband and father in the home applies with equal force to the wife and mother, for many women do as much, if not more, than their husbands toward destroying the home. Many women allow themselves to become so absorbed in the social world and in public questions that they lose all taste for the home life.

In these days we hear so much about women's rights and woman's sphere. Many women have come to look upon the home kingdom as too small for their high ambitions; they aspire for what they deem higher and nobler honors than those accruing from building a fine home. Their dream is for the public platform and public life, and they ignore the noblest work in life—the home—that they might win laurels in other fields.

It was Confucius who said, "If the domestic duties be well performed there is no need to go afar to offer sacrifice."



Granting, then, the ever-widening sphere of woman's influence and the possibility of her earning fame for brilliant achievements outside the home kingdom, it should never be forgotten that her first duties undoubtedly begin with the home, and if home duties be generally neglected, all attempts at performing wider duties in other spheres must end in failure. Woman's influence may be as dwarfing and disintegrating as it is ennobling and elevating.

We must admit that we have come upon dangerous times when women are entering business pursuits and public life to the jeopardy of the home.

Professor D. L. Kiehle of the chair of psychology in the University of Minnesota gave utterance to a timely truth and words of warning concerning the home

before the department of superintendents of the National Educational Association, which convened recently in Chicago. He declared the fact that women and girls were being drawn into commercial and manufacturing pursuits jeopardized the welfare of future mothers and was a menace to a happy home life. It is stated by the public press that the address of the professor touched a popular feeling in the minds of the thousand or more educators from all points of the compass, and that portions of the address, stating that home life and surroundings were above all other gains, was applauded. Professor Kiehle said: "In this age of commercialism and industrial conditions no provision has been made for motherhood. This phase of life seems to have been brushed aside. In fact, we are making money-

earners of our daughters in commercial pursuits. While women will have every right to an equality with men in matters of education, they are outside their sphere when that portion of their education fitting them for home life and motherhood does not take precedence over everything else."

No doubt some emancipated women will read these words of wisdom with a sneer, but that will not make them any the less true. An eminent physician expressed his belief that the evil tendency referred to by Professor Kiehle is one of the great dangers which threaten the perpetuity of the home life and consequently the national life. Woman's influence over her husband has been fitly compared to what the rolling process is to the gold-rolling it into multitudinous sheets; so she either increases his strength and multiplies his graces or drags him down to her own level. Many a wife who is adored by her husband, through her empty and frivolous selfishness has dragged him down into misery and ruin.

Dr. Theodore Cuyler says "good management and frugality" in the home "are

apt to mean prosperity," while "extravagance there means vexation, temptation to recklessness, business gambling and eventual ruin." Half of the married men who practice swindling are pushed on to it by a wicked mistress or an extravagant wife and family. A wife is the best of friends or the worst of enemies. Dr. Cuyler asks, "Where lies the sorest sorrow that disturbs the heart-peace and spoils all the luster of worldly gains or honors?" He answers, "It is the worm that lies at the root of the home life," and he further states, "It is of little account to a man to be prosperous in his store or his office or his pulpit, if he be wretched at his own hearthstone."

This is suggested to us in these words of this eminent divine the great necessity of the queen of the home being a good and wise queen in the fullest sense. Great evil may result from the misdirected exaggeration of her best affections, as is seen in so many painful instances. The saying of Emerson, "Men are what their mothers made them," may be said of the wife's influence over her husband; he is what his wife makes him.

The Princess Johanna Bismarck fulfilled as near as possible the wife's and mother's place in life. She was the most devoted of life companions to the great statesman and the most loving of mothers to her children. One writing of her death says, "If the Bismarckian household exhibited a type of patriarchal family life which linked parents and children

in a circle of trustful tenderness, the merit belonged in an especial degree to the dutiful Princess. She warmed the home with the sunny simplicity of her nature, and when storms were raging wildly without she afforded her wearied and sorely tried husband a comfortable corner wherein to forget the excitements of troubled days, to take the innocent pleasures in life amid the home circle, and to collect his strength for renewed efforts."

In this way the Princess played indirectly a part in politics that was not unimportant, filling the warlike Chancellor with an irrepressible joy in life and indefatigable courage for the fray. But it is said she never sought to make her strong personal influence felt in political questions.

"This is certainly a beautiful as well as powerful illustration of the best and most effectual way for women to wield their influence in politics and public matters. A woman in the home who walks grandly and who is upright will not lead her husband to walk unworthily and will not drag him downward. A godly and wise wife will not rule her husband with a despotic hand."

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil."

"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."

After all is said and done, home is woman's first place. Here she must appear at her best, strong, beautiful, good.

In the last analysis, home happiness depends on the wife and mother. While woman's influence reaches far beyond the home, yet woman at home, as its queen, beautifying, sanctifying, adorning, and blessing it, wields a greater influence for good than woman in public life.

It was Mrs. Beecher who said: "Let home stand first before all other things." "No matter," said she, "how high your ambition may transcend its duties, no matter how far your talents or your influence may reach beyond its doors, before everything else build up a true home! Be not its slave; be its minister! Let it not be enough that it is sweet and garnished, that its silver is brilliant, that its food is delicious, but feed the love in it, feed the truth in it, feed thought and aspiration, feed all charity and gentleness in it. Then from its walls shall come forth true woman and the true man, who shall together rule and bless the land."

This is not an overwrought picture. There can be no greater honor than to found such a home and then can be no higher dignity than to reign its undisputed, honored mistress.

Mr. Beecher asks, "What is the ability to speak from a public platform to large, intelligent audiences, or the wisdom that commands a seat on the Judge's bench, compared to that which can insure and preside over a true home, that husband and children rise and call her blessed?" Truly, "to be the guiding star, the ruling spirit in such a position, is higher honor than to rule an empire."

There is no greater need in our country than a revival of pure home devotion; but before that is possible there must be a greater regard for the sanctity of the marriage tie. This needs to be written about, preached about and taught to the rising generation until all shall realize the sacredness of the wedded relation. Then the laws of the land must be constructed and become so uniform on this divine institution that they will be a fence about it to guard and protect it against any unholy invasion.

About the time when Christianity was ushered into the world family life was terribly decayed through frequency of divorce and increase of licentiousness. Women, it is said, counted the years, not by the number of the consuls, but by the number of their rejected husbands; they divorced themselves so often that they wore out their bridal veils.

Tertullian, speaking of the women of that age, says: "As for divorce, they long for it; they long for it as though it were the natural consequences of marriages."

At one time laws had to be passed for the restraint of immorality, compelling people to marry; and at another time laws had to be passed restraining them from marrying.

History seems to be repeating itself in respect to the matter of divorce. It is indeed appalling the light manner in which many hold the wedded relation and the home tie. Hearts are too often given like street merchandise or driven like bought slaves in fair freedom's guise. Love and mind are poisoned with perjury's foul stains and too often the cold world binds hearts in joyless marriage chains. A much-needed exhortation is contained in these lines:

"Be ye true unto yourselves; Let rank and fortune go; If love light not the altar spot, Let feeling answer no."

But woman is seen at her best in the home in the capacity of mother. Some one has said home is where mother is. There can be no ideal home without a sweet, godly mother. What would home be without her presence and love? The house, with all its household equipments, may remain intact, but when mother is