

THE AMERICAN  
NATIONAL PREACHER.

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No. 8. Vol. 9.] NEW-YORK, JAN. 1835. [WHOLE No. 104.

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SERMON CLXXX.

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A GOOD WIFE A HEAVENLY GIFT.

Prov. xix. 14. *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; and a prudent wife is from the Lord.*

OUR present life, though frequently and justly styled a life of sorrow and disappointment, is also one of great and varied enjoyment. The earth is full of the goodness of Jehovah, and all the departments of life, and every individual in every department have their full share of this goodness. And one of the great sources of nearly all the sorrow and anxieties, in social life particularly, is, that many men know not the full value of one single blessing which they possess—that is a good wife.

Among the many never failing sources of enjoyment connected with the present state of things, the exercise of the social affections holds a distinguished place. The phrases “a good neighbor, a good father, a good mother, a good sister, a good brother, a good son and a good daughter, and a good companion,” are well understood by all, as full of meaning, and full of enjoyment, but no human tongue can express all the enjoyment which they contain, or even communicate.

And in the wise and the good, and extended and comprehensive arrangements of Providence, all these, and all the enjoyments derived from them, spring from one common source—a good wife and a good mother. By the very constitution of our nature, the whole character of civil society, from the smallest family to the largest empire, is formed by the aggregate character of the mothers and wives within the district.

By a figure of speech common in all languages, and among all classes of men, all the qualifications of a good wife and a good mother, are in the text expressed by one term, viz:—*prudence*. Prudence, in its strict and proper sense, has a particular reference to the choice of fit means to accomplish a particular end, in the easiest and safest method possible. And with a good wife, not only the possession, but the daily exercise of this invaluable gift is indispensable. There is in fact no individual, in all the branches of society, who has such constant, and daily, and hourly use for this quality of mind.

The management of the family falls chiefly upon the wife, and whatever may be the state of the family resources, or the character of the members, the wife is responsible for the whole. She has to manage children of every age, and in every state of health and sickness, and of every kind of temper and disposition. She has to manage servants who are always more or less to be instructed and watched, as well as directed, and who are frequently very

fluctuating and irritable. Her house is also more or less open at all times to neighbors, and friends, and strangers, who in many cases require extensive and varied attention. And add to all—it not unfrequently happens—that the daily business of the husband is by no means well adapted to the convenience either of his wife, or of any of his friends—so that his regular visits to the bosom of his family, are to *receive*, rather than to *give* assistance and refreshment. And this, where there is no lack of affection.

It is thus, that the best arrangements of any family which has the least intercourse with the neighborhood, or with the world, is almost daily liable to interruptions, and all the members of the little republic are continually changing their relative position to one another, and to others. And thus the temper and patience, and expedients, and resources of the woman, who is at the head of the establishment, must be continually tried, and in many cases tried most severely. Of what importance then to any man, and to society at large, must be the enjoyment of “a prudent and efficient wife.”

I. Let us attend to some things included in the phrase “a prudent wife.”

1. A good wife must possess a large share of what is called “common sense.” She must know by a kind of instinct how to act on every emergency—catch as it were by inspiration, the leading features in the characters and dispositions of the individuals, old or young, friends or strangers, to whom she is introduced, and with whom she is to act stately or occasionally. Without this, every other talent she may possess, and every attainment she may have acquired, will be of little use either to herself or to her family.

2. A good wife must be distinguished for self-command. A wife is at the head of a little society, in which are all the elements of every kind of society. But all these elements are here, in an unformed, and forming, and most fluctuating state. Hence, the first and most important lesson to be studied, and to be acquired by the individual who presides over a society in this state is, that she have, on all occasions, the most perfect command of herself.

3. Industry and economy form a third distinguishing feature in the character of a good wife. This is the leading feature in the detail which is given us by the Spirit of inspiration, Prov. xxxi, 10—end. It will be well for our country, and for our world, when this passage of holy writ shall be fully understood by every mother and every daughter of our land. Happy would it have been this day for the British nation, and for these United States, had this passage been made the text-book for female education, instead of the large importations which have been made of teachers, and of systems of education, and of maxims and habits from Italy and France.

The industry and economy of a wife, is particularly exhibited in having all the intervals of time, within the whole range of her government, filled up with some necessary and profitable employment, and in taking special care of fragments of time and fragments of property.

4. A good wife is an affectionate woman. The law of love and sincerity is written upon her heart; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. Every domestic, and every friend, and every stranger, and the friend of every distant friend and acquaintance, finds himself immediately at home while under her roof, and while partaking of her hospitality. Nor in all her intercourse with strangers or with acquaintances, does she cherish a thought, or willingly utter a syllable with the design of injuring the feelings or the character of a single human being. She will not take up, much less will she give circulation to a reproach against her neighbor, though this reproach should be brought to her table or whispered to her in her bed-chamber.

5. A good wife is of domestic habits, and of a domestic disposition. She enjoys herself nowhere so well as under her own roof, and while attending to her own private affairs. Her husband and her children, and the daily ordinary cares of the family, occupy her chief earthly attention. She is a good neighbor, and can always enjoy a good neighbor, whether at home or abroad.

But her own family is her peculiar and special province, and she has no desire to meddle with the domestic arrangements of any of her sister sovereigns. When she enters a neighboring family, it is to administer in some form to their comforts, not to embarrass them with their friends. Let wives, and mothers, and young women who expect soon to be at the head of households, read and study attentively, 1 Tim. v, 9—14.

One sinner destroys much good. One busy tattling woman, whether married or single, is enough to destroy all the social comforts of many families. And on the other hand, one prudent woman may be worth a thousand in preserving all that is valuable in the social intercourse of a village, or city, or neighborhood. Read and study the history of Abigail, 1 Sam. xxv, and of the woman of Tekoah, 2 Sam. xiv, 1—20, and of the wise woman mentioned in 2 Sam. xx, 16—22.

6. All these and similar qualifications in the good wife, must be associated with the possession and the exercise of genuine and ardent piety. The description of a good wife in the Bible, already referred to, closes with these important words: "Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

Infidels themselves, with very few exceptions, acknowledge the importance and necessity of piety among females. Take a sense of religion from a female, and she is an object of abhorrence even to those who are themselves polluted with every crime; and while many wicked fathers are by both precept and example initiating their own sons, and other young men, into all the elements of irreligion and debauchery, they shudder at the very thought of their wives and their daughters not being under the influence of the religion and morality of the Bible. If a little of this good thing then, be of such vital importance, even with those who personally know nothing of its value, of what value must it be, when it shall be the leading and the commanding principle of action in those upon whose fidelity, and activity, and daily and hourly labors, the welfare and the enjoyment of the whole community, must in every generation and in every state of society, from the very nature of things, depend? If a man is to be happy any where on earth, it must be in the bosom of his own family, rejoicing with the wife of his youth. And we repeat it, if a little of genuine piety, or of what may be only the semblance of genuine piety, be of such value in the estimation of those who personally know nothing of it, of what value must that wife be to her husband and to her family, whose piety is always ardent, and incorporated with all her plans and all her movements?

Genuine and ardent piety is of the utmost importance for the personal support and comfort of a good wife. She has in all her plans and in all her movements, her peculiar difficulties—difficulties which in many cases he can communicate to no human being—and difficulties also which when known to others, can be removed or alleviated only by the favor and the goodness of the Almighty. To her Father who is in heaven she must often look for direction and assistance, when neither father, nor mother, nor husband, nor any earthly friend can help in the least degree. Every pious wife and mother is familiar with the experience of the psalmist, "when my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul."

Nor can the affection and piety of the husband, however sincere and ardent, relieve the mind of the wife in numerous cases of anxiety and difficulty. It is written, "Confounded be all they who serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols. Worship him, (that is Jehovah,) all ye gods." In every case, in exact proportion as the heart of a good wife is given to idolatry, she will be disappointed in the quarter from which she expected deliverance.

Genuine and ardent piety is indispensable in the character of a good wife,

for fulfilling the great and continued and extended plans of Providence. Under God, mothers form the character and the destiny of the whole human family. As the infant, the boy or girl is, so, with very few exceptions, will be the full grown man or woman. The great and leading features of the mother's character, are indelibly stamped upon every son and daughter of Adam. It is the great law of our nature, "Like everywhere produces and cherishes and perfects its like." Had it not been for the continued operations of this law, meekness, and gentleness, and goodness, and all the amiable and endearing qualities of humanity would probably have long ago been extinct, and utterly unknown in all those countries where the gospel is unknown. And in those countries and districts which have enjoyed the gospel, the influence of the pious and active wife and mother, has at all times been seen and felt and acknowledged by all, as one of the principal means by which generation after generation have served the Redeemer. The prospects of every particular church and congregation, have always been encouraging, as to the continuance of the gospel among them, just in proportion to the good character of the majority of the mothers.

Nor can there be any other individual so well qualified for forming human character, as a pious mother. Her affection for her own offspring is sincere and strong and lasting. She knows the value of the human soul; and is not unacquainted with the state of the world, and the realities of eternity. She has access to the understanding, and to the heart, and to the conscience of her children, as no other human being can have. She knows in her own experience, the truth of God's promise, and the efficacy which Jehovah has been pleased to attach to the prayer of faith. How often has she the opportunity of whispering in the ear of her child, and into the ear of her God at the same time, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me. As for me, this is my covenant with them saith the Lord; my spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever."

A worthy father in the ministry, who has seen much of domestic society in all the departments of life, has said, that he has yet to find a respectable family of sons and daughters where the mother was an ignorant or imprudent woman; but he has seen and known many respectable sons and daughters whose fathers were worthless, but whose mothers were the excellent ones of the earth.

We now consider,

II. In what respects a good wife is peculiarly and specially from the Lord.

1. The woman was originally formed to be an essential and special help to the man. Read and study attentively, Genesis ii, 18—20.

The man was set at the head of the lower world; he was made the lord of the earth, and of all that it contained—was to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; but he could have no enjoyment of any one of these, or of them all collectively, till another being was made. There was not as yet in the whole range of creation, an help meet for him. Hence woman, the last and the best and the noblest of all that was created, was formed. And was formed expressly to fill up the blank, and to supply the deficiency, and to put man into a situation in which he would be capable of enjoying his ample domain. And infinite wisdom and infinite power and infinite goodness adapted all belonging both to the body and to the mind of the woman, to that high and dignified rank, which was originally allotted to her in the scale of being. She commanded the heart of the man, and held in her hand the property and the destiny of millions upon millions. And if woman has ever been degraded, and rendered unfit for such a dignified station, it has been by the mutual transgression of

the man and the woman. It has been because our common nature has lost its original dignity, and has become depraved and corrupted.

2. Almost every pious man can trace very distinctly a special providence, in the arrangement of the circumstances, which connected him with the woman of his choice.

“House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; but a prudent wife is from the Lord.” The son may know at a very early period of life, and long before he is of age, what will probably be the amount of his earthly inheritance. But he knows not till he has obtained her, what kind of wife he is to have; and in cases without number this great and important matter is settled very expeditiously, and without much reasoning and reflection—in the common language of men, it is wholly a matter of feeling and of accident; yet the pious man who has been blest with that best of earthly blessings, a good wife, will often review with astonishment and gratitude, the manner in which a vast number of otherwise unconnected contingencies were at that most important period of his sojourn here below, all over-ruled, and all concentrated towards that one object.

Again, “House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; but a prudent wife is from the Lord.” It makes no matter how extensive, or how valuable the landed, or the funded estate of the young heir may be. Unless Jehovah in his goodness shall bless him with a prudent wife, it soon may be squandered to the four winds. The destiny of thousands upon thousands in high life, may be appealed to for the illustration of this fact.

What a caution is here suggested to parents, while they are making prospective arrangements for their children! How important also is it that young people should early acquire the habit of acknowledging God in all their ways; and that they be particularly urgent, and make it a matter again and again of special prayer, that they may be directed in their feelings and in their social intercourse with one another!

3. It is by the special arrangements of Providence, that a good wife is continued to any man, and continued as a blessing and enjoyment.

When we take into view the daily and nightly fatigues; the cares and anxieties which in many cases fill up the whole life of an affectionate and active wife and mother, it is a matter of astonishment that so many of them maintain their vigor and activity to the last stage of their earthly existence. There certainly is a sense in which the woman is not the “weaker vessel.” There is certainly in the very constitution of most of women, a something which fits them for enduring labors day after day, and night after night, which would crush in a very short period the most robust constitution known among men.

Consider again, that the whole domestic happiness depends upon an infinite variety of modifications of little things, and that all these little things, in all their various modifications are agreeable, or disagreeable, according to the temper, and disposition, and habits of the wife. All the world over, just in proportion as the wife is in good humor and has the full command of herself, is the enjoyment of the husband, and of the children, and of all the domestics. But he who commands the heavens and the moving of the mighty deep, can only effectually command the movements of the human heart in either man or woman. How important then is it, that a good husband should daily and hourly pray for his affectionate and pious wife; and how important is it, that every son and daughter should offer up sincere and fervent, and continued prayers for their mother.

III. We attend to the practical improvement of the whole subject. And,

1. Some of us once had good mothers, who are now in glory. We knew not their full value when we were under their care and protection. Nor can we at this day form any proper estimate of what we daily enjoy, as the fruit of their labors and prayers. What shall we render to the Lord for all his

benefits towards us? Let each of us say, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant and the son of thine handmaid."

The most of us who are young have still good mothers. Let us tremble at the thought of rejecting their authority, or treating them in any degree, or on any occasion with disrespect. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."

It is presumed that the most of us (who have wives) have good wives; but if any of us are not so comfortable in that connection as we could wish to be, it may be well for us to remember, that the blame may be in the man rather than the woman.

And to all, whether young or old, married or unmarried, the admonition of the apostle applies: "Brethren the time is short. It remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it. For the fashion of this world passeth away."

2. The subject suggests the importance and necessity of an extended and perfectly Christian course of education, for the female mind. The Redeemer always has made, and always will make, extensive use of females in his great and extended plans of mercy. The whole plan of salvation has for its object the restoring of our lost race and our apostate world, to something like their original dignity and glory. Hence we have every reason to believe, that the whole body of women will be renovated and elevated, as an essential and efficient part of the great system of means for accomplishing this great and glorious end.

Were all the mothers within the bosom of the church, the good mother of the Bible, all the children of the church would be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and every family would furnish in a very few years, one or two missionaries for the heathen world.

Were all the mothers in the land, the industrious, economical, and pious mother of the Bible, the whole face of society would be changed to the better in half a generation, and the government of the nation, the conducting of all national affairs, would become a very simple and easy operation.

3. To any husband who has lost by death a good wife, and to any children who have by death lost a good mother, the subject suggests not only a reason for the most cordial resignation, but reasons also for holy joy and elevation of mind.

A pious lady, whose husband had died in the evening, being asked next morning by a friend, *how* she felt, answered: "I have just been thinking how happy my good husband must be this morning, as he has been *one night* with the Redeemer in glory."

It was your new covenant God, who gave the good wife and the good mother, who made her a blessing and comfort, while she was continued here below. And she was preserved and made a blessing, under the protection of the prayer of the Mediator, "I pray not that thou shouldst take her out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep her from evil." And when she had served her God in her day and generation, she was removed in answer to another prayer of the Mediator, "Father, I will that she whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that she may behold my glory which thou hast given me." And it is no mean honor to have a wife and a mother thus exalted.

And heaven is the home of the great family of the redeemed. They shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. And thrice happy will that mother and father, and those sons and daughters be, who having been united in the closest ties on earth, shall as an unbroken family, become a constituent part of that one great assembly above.