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→ S E R M O N S ←

RELIGION—THE MOTIVE POWER IN HUMAN PROGRESS.

BY JOHN H. BARROWS, D.D., FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO.

That is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.—JOHN i., 9.
There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man coming into the world.—
REVISED VERSION.

MODERN scientific research, unveiling the marvels of Nature, finds her chief wonders centering in light. Light is the great mediator between matter and mind, the messenger that traverses all dark continents of truth, augmenting human knowledge. Light is not only the creator of beauty and the inspirer of joy, as the Greek and Hebrew poets knew, but it is also the source of almost immeasurable power. It is light that beats the stubborn glacier into dancing rivulets, and refreshes the earth by lifting the waters from the surface of the sea into the crystal goblets of the clouds. Light is the bringer of life to the world, and without light the reign of death would become universal. And so Christian thought is discerning in Christ the spiritual light that explains the past and illumines the future of our race. He has been the chief attractive power by which men have been lifted toward God. He is the mediating agency between the seen and the unseen, whereby the spiritual world has become real and mighty unto mankind. Without Him life is a sad eclipse of hope, philosophy a vain search into darkness, and all history an unsolved enigma. He is the desire of all nations, and "the secret of man," as the old Jewish proverb tells us, "is the secret of the Messiah."

→* Young Women's Service *←

WOMAN: HER DUES AND HER DEBTS.

BY CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D.D., MADISON SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK.

Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.—
PROVERBS xxxi., 30, 31.

A DISCOURSE addressed to women, particularly to young women, is complicated with many difficulties. During these last years there have been made from this place several appeals to young men, but not one to young women. This is in part accounted for by the exceeding delicacy with which matters involved need to be treated and presented. If there is to be anything said, it must be spoken in such a manner of plainness as that it shall be understood, and yet in such a manner of decorum and discretion as that no finest taste shall take reasonable wound.

In the course of my somewhat concerned preparation for this morning's work I have scrutinized with interest the instructions—ordination instructions—which Paul gave to Titus. He bids him inculcate on old men sobriety, on the aged women propriety, on young men discretion, and on slaves fidelity, but gives him no charge for the young women, except that he should so indoctrinate the elder women in matters of truth and behavior as that they, the elder women, should themselves become the preceptors of their daughters in matters relevant to life and conduct. In this way the young Titus was spared the difficulty and perplexity of saying anything to the younger female members of his congregation directly, or of saying anything about them with particularity. Consonant with this is the fact of certain limitations and omissions in Paul's own preaching, as in the sixth of Ephesians, where he seems to resolve his readers into but the three classes, parents, children and slaves; or as in the general letter of John where that apostle makes specific appeal only to fathers, young men and children. Some difficulty, you perceive, seems to attach to the matter we have in hand, which even the apostles were conscious of, and that too even in their seasons of inspiration. And all of this embarrassment is certainly attributable in degree, as just said, to occasion of delicacy.

That, however, is only a part explanation of the difficulty. For all problems, not only those which fall within the province of the pulpit, but all problems into which young womanhood enters as a factor, are regularly confused with accessories of awkwardness and ingredients of embarrassment. Philosophy breaks down; opinion falls apart. It would seem as though certain prior questions still remained unsettled, certain fundamental matters

needed to be better understood, before young womanhood could be discussed with effect or the particular problems relating to her be resolved with any promise of unanimity or finality.

An illustration in point would be that of female education, in regard to which opinions are at present so discrepant. Our mention of that matter must, in such a place as this, of course, be brief and only for illustrative purposes. In matters of masculine education general principles have been already pretty accurately determined and quite definitely announced, and there is in these respects among educators a quite close accord. When a young man is sent to school or to college it is agreed on all sides that there is in it a definite intent. It is assumed that there are no more young men in the world than there are places for these young men to fill; and schooling, be it of the academy, the college, the university, is maintained with a constant and conscious reference to the fact that the results which schooling yields in the shape of personal power, intellectual and moral, are to be made tributary to some pronounced purpose and expended in the pursuit of some practical end. It is not important that a boy, when he begins going to school, should know precisely what it is that he is going to do in the world, but it is of incalculable worth to the boy even then to know that he is going to do *something*, and that the power which comes to him from his schooling he is going to expend *in doing* that something. That gives to the boy a purpose, more or less definite as the case may be, and purpose is inspiration, and purpose is power. Our masculine institutions of learning, I say, are worked on that principle. The whole school administration, so far as relates to male students, is animated by a spirit of fine utilitarianism; it is not school for school's sake, nor education for education's sake, but it is means of *power* for the sake of the *work* that accrued power will *do*. That makes a school for boys a live thing and sets it at the furthest possible remove from the formal and the perfunctory. Any person familiar with young men's schools and young ladies' schools both, knows what a comparatively motiveless affair the latter of the two is likely, or at least liable, to be. The male student feels that somewhere a position of activity is waiting for him, and he thinks he can almost hear that waiting position summoning him to more strenuous endeavor, and the future challenging him to equal himself to his destiny; the coming years are felt by him already to be laying their strong hand upon him; and so the expanding prospect stimulates the growing boy, and the growing boy lays ever new color and expanse upon the broadening prospect.

When, on the contrary, we cross into the area of feminine education we find everything pronouncing itself with less vigor of tone and shaping itself with less sharpness of outline. The equation is complicated with unknown quantities. There is among men no general agreement as to what exactly woman is, or means, and what precisely she is for, and rather less agreement among her own sex. She has been the standing conundrum of history, and we still write her with an interrogation point. She has been a great while in finding her place, and slow in even suspecting that any place of power and

dignity is her due. She has been put in the stall with the cattle, and she has been set on Olympus with the gods. Dean Swift in giving account of a disaster summarized it by saying, "two hundred souls lost and several women and children." Of course that is satire, but, like satire generally, sustains itself by the support of a certain amount of lurking sentiment in the community.

The sex has been slow in becoming reduced to anything like exact and final statement. Woman has been cautiously conceded to have powers of thought and to be susceptible to a degree of discipline, but those susceptibilities have been regarded suspiciously and handled evasively. The boy says of his girl playmate, "She is nothing but a girl;" and the relics of such sentiment disappear only gradually even after we become grown. It is an oriental proverb that "Ignorance is a woman's jewel," and that "Female wisdom is from the devil." Niebuhr thought it inexpedient to give a girl many advantages. Her place has not been fixed, nor her latitude and longitude determined. She gets written still with an interrogation mark, or a point of exclamation which is a good deal like it. Being thus rated as an unknown quantity, every problem into which she enters as a factor is to that degree debarred from solution.

There is another way of regarding woman, similarly tentative and non-committal and particularly in vogue among the higher social classes, which is to consider her rather in the light of a delicacy; as no true constituent of the bone and sinew of society; more an ornament than a utility, like the pictures we hang on our walls, or the statuary we range in our alcoves; serving in the capacity of an æsthetic luxury—a kind of live art. It is this estimate of her that accounts for the stress which is by the opposite sex laid upon the matter of woman's personal adornment, dress and the like. The excesses to which personal decoration of the kind is carried are probably chargeable in about equal proportions to the two sexes. Women love to transfigure themselves with millinery and men love to have them do so. It is the attempt on man's part to convert women to æsthetic uses. It is a kind of compromise, if you will consider it carefully—it is a kind of compromise between the idea of woman as a chattel and the idea of her as a person; as already said, it is treating her as live art, without there being with either party an appreciation, always, of the quiet indignity that *may* be given and taken in the transaction.

In ordinary instances the affront, if any there be, will be so disguised as to escape recognition, and only in extremes the real animus and motive be realized; as in the case of the woman who came to us from abroad with the deliberate intent of sinking her womanly personality and of posing before the American public simply in the capacity of animate marble, with just enough of dramatic accessories to keep the woman in countenance and save the exhibit from disrepute.

And the same impulse that prompts to the artistic decoration of the female figure also conduces to secure for her all those graces of demeanor and of speech, and all those elegant accomplishments which, while not making any considerable draft on her intelligence and not awakening into enlistment

and exercise the intense personal powers, mental and moral, that are natively hers, nevertheless operate to enhance her charms as an article of *vertu*. And so, as the times have altered and conditions varied, the respect has varied in which woman has been held: at one time condemned to the field and counted with the cattle, at another time condemned to the drawing-room and inventoried with marbles, oils and water-colors; but only in instances, comparatively rare, acknowledged and recognized in the fulness of her moral and intellectual possibilities and in the beautiful completeness of her personal dignity, prowess and obligation; unchivalrously twitted with having involved the race in sin and misery through collusion with the devil, but with less ingenuousness accredited with having opened the way for the recovery of the race to holiness and blessedness by collusion with the Almighty in the conception of the Divine Redeemer.

Now, this is not the place to go into any nice discussion of the discrepancies between masculinity and femininity. A womanly woman is feminine by nature, more feminine by grace, and will, I expect, be consummately feminine by translation. The personal possibilities of the woman, intellectual and moral, are to be ascertained as accurately as possible and, when ascertained, are to be construed and treated in the same manner as the possibilities of the other sex. What it lies in the nature of a thing to become is a providential indication of what God wants it should become, by improvement and development. Every possibility that is within us, man or woman, speaks to us with the voice of a divine challenge. The parable of the talents belongs to the young women of this congregation exactly as much as it does to the young men. What a boy is by nature stands in fixed ratio with what the man is bound to become by acquisition. And what a girl is by nature stands in fixed ratio with what the woman is bound to become by acquisition. When a woman steps up to the bar of judgment and shows to the Lord the five talents with which he originally endowed her, with no additional talents of her own accumulating, and the Lord says to her: "You ought to have put them to the exchangers that when I came I might receive Mine own with usury," and she answers, "Dear Lord, you must excuse me; I am a woman; I have wrapped what you gave me in the napkin of femininity," the plea is not going to avail. It is the intention of Providence that a man should be something besides an old boy. It is the intention of Providence that a woman should be something besides an old girl. The gifts of God are stamped with the image and superscription of God. The parable of the talents is pertinent to both sexes. I should regret to have it supposed that this is intended as admonitory to the women, younger or older, of this particular congregation. God forbid! But the air needs to be cleared and the whole subject rescued from ambiguity and confusion. Womanhood is no more unknown quantity than manhood is unknown quantity, provided only we will approach the matter with a clear eye, a clean heart, and a balanced understanding.

And the distinct settling of such preliminaries practically settles all that

comes after. For substance it settles the matter of woman's education. An uneducated woman is as much a mistake as an uneducated man is a mistake. And by feminine education I do not mean the power to mask one's ignorance in neat disguises, nor facility in uttering nothingness in elegant phrases, nor a smattering of pretty accomplishments and tasty mannerisms that shall make the young woman a lovely curiosity and a neat little piece of live bric-a-brac in the drawing-room. I mean by education, first of all, womanliness, built out of alternate layers of intelligence sharpened by discipline and integrity chastened by the manifold graces of God. And, next to the Holy Ghost, that is what society and the home need more than anything else—sanctified wit, clad in the garb and saturated with the animus of femininity. Toward that ideal the sex is verging, the ideal of twinship with men in likeness to God as announced in the first chapter of Genesis. We are sometimes thought to have outgrown this old Bible. In the matter in hand we are not yet fairly abreast with its first page. Toward the ideal the sex, I say, is verging and the attainments she has made have been made, not by the aid of man, but in spite of man at the instance of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit, by the pressure of her own unconfined nature and indomitable pluck.

First and foremost then, in order to the just settlement of all aspects of the woman-question, we have to look upon her as a creature produced, not with the bare intent of keeping man company and relieving his *ennui*, but of being a new and positive factor, a "helpmeet" for man; not merely a feminine vine twining around a masculine post, but with independent powers of mind and heart whose development should establish her in live relation with the world and the times in which she lives. A young woman, as much as a young man, belongs to her times. If a young woman is poor then she ministers to her times, per force of necessity, in order to earn her daily bread. She may expend her power in some manufactory and be paid for it, or teach school and earn a salary; but the point is that if a young woman has means, or her father has, so that work is not a necessity, she is exceedingly likely to hold herself aloof from all the business not only, but all the interests, needs, exigencies of her times on the ground that she is a woman and therefore, unlike a young man, can have no proper demands of the kind laid upon her; in other words, that her sex is exemption from obligation.

Now, if it happens that I am speaking to any young woman whose property, actual or prospective, renders work unnecessary as a livelihood, and who on that score excuses herself from actual service of some kind in others' behalf, I am going to say to you in kindly candor three things: you are a dishonor to your sex; you are a traitor to your kind; you are renegade from the cause of the Divine Master, Who gave Himself to the world in order to save the world, and Who left to you as well as to me the same obligation in bequest. Besides this let me say that all power, such as your opportunities of culture have afforded you, is the correlate of work; and God and all just intelligence discerns it so. Also, that life will have only so much valid and nourishing meaning as you, by the vigor and splendor of your purposes, read into life.

Let me add, for your sake and that of your father and mother, that an aimless life is property upon which the devil regularly holds the first mortgage. Now that seems a hard way to speak to a young woman with a bright face and a clean heart. Still I am not extemporizing on this matter. Fathers are praying over it, and mothers are weeping over it. Aimlessness is certain to drift, and the drift is never up stream. And in such a place as this a young woman with social instincts cannot be far from shore before the current will begin to pull upon her with vigor. What begins as aimlessness easily hardens into selfishness, and selfishness with means to gratify it is the prolific mother of a large and bad brood.

In connection with this matter of exemption from responsibility and disposition to be treated as a dependency rather than as a working factor another point comes to easy mention which the young people of either sex will readily appreciate. It has to do with the establishment of THE HOME, a matter so vital in all its relations, civil and religious, that anything like apology for its mention would both be bad doctrine and poor taste. And the case stated concisely and boldly is this: that many a young man who would like to establish a home, and ought to, is deterred from doing so by the fact that he is as yet unable to maintain a wife in the style in which the young woman of his choice can be maintained while living under the roof of her affluent father—and ambitious mother.

Two or three things are to be said there. Probably in seventy-five cases out of a hundred their affluent parents began life in a humble way and have attained to circumstances of comfort, in large degree, because of the early and compatible relation cemented between them, and it is no more discreditable to your suitor to be impecunious than it was for your father to be, or than it will be for your grandchild to be, as he most likely will be, for large property rarely remains in the same family in our country more than two or three generations. The beauty of a home and the strength of a home is that it is the product of affectionate co-operation and conspiracy between the prime partners to the contract. Society has not yet made any improvement on the marriage idea as it is laid down in the second chapter of God's book—that the wife is to be her husband's *helpmeet*. And there is no time when a man needs the encouragement, the comfort, the stimulus, and, I will add, the guardianship of an affectionate wife more than he does at the start, and when he is at the bottom of the hill; and if the young woman has not heart enough to be willing to dispense with some conveniences when the young man is at the bottom of the hill, she is not fit to have him for a husband when he gets to the top.

There remains only one point more for brief mention. When the home has been established and its membership multiplied, clearly the circumstances of the case will considerably, if not altogether, hinder the helpmeet and mother from mixing largely in the educational and charitable interests, and the like, lying outside of her own family environment. With the contingency of marriage before her, and the "contractedness of the sphere" into which

marriage will admit her, there presses upon the girl and young woman no earnest sense of the need of making the most of the gifts which God has conferred upon her and cultivating with vigor those possibilities of mind and personality that slumber in her various and opulent nature.

There is a word to be said about this "contracted sphere." On the contrary, there is not an element of power intellectual, moral, affectional, that will not find in the motherly province the largest field for play, and the widest scope for action. "France wants mothers," said Madam Campan to Napoleon. America wants mothers, say I. The hope of civilization is the home, and the hope of the home is the mother. "She who rocks the cradle rules the world," wrote Jerrold. The history of the world is summarized in the history of its great men, and the history of great men is prefigured in the history of the mothers of great men; hence Scripture, which so rarely blunders, regularly introduces its biographies with a character-sketch of the mother. In this way woman holds the future in her own hands. She not only produces the child, she determines the child, provided only she has the determining power and the consolidating and establishing power born of will, heart and intelligence. The mother can make her boy be what she wants him to be, and make him to be permanently what she wants him to be, provided there be that in her which not only appeals to his love but that challenges his *admiration*. America wants mothers grand enough for their boys to admire and reverence, mothers with deep insights, strong grasp and rich appreciations, so that the boys shall grow up in an atmosphere of verity, and verity become in that way constituent of them, and thus their whole life catch its inflexible angle, temporal and eternal, at the fireside. That is what motherhood, Christian motherhood, means. Its scope is wide as history and long as the ages. It is meaningless, characterless motherhood and enervated homes that we dread more than we do the outward assaults of immorality or insinuations of a gross philosophy; for it is the enervation of the home that gives to gross philosophy and bad morality the opportunity to take hold and do its corroding and poisonous work. Civilization will be kept as grand as the home is kept, and the keystone of the home is the mother.

For what, then, O Lord, can we more justly or intensely pray, than that Thou wilt open the eyes of us all to the deep reality of things; that Thou wilt enter with Thy Spirit of wisdom and discernment into all of these homes; that Thou wilt create in these mothers a glowing sense of the large and long destinies for weal or for woe that motherhood, by its very nature, has lodged within it; and in particular that the minds and hearts of the girls and young women of our time and city may be cleansed from all foolishness and insincerity; that they may contemplate themselves in that character of dignity for which they were divinely designed, and that they may be stimulated by the promptings of their mothers and the suggestions of the Holy Ghost to equal themselves to every reach of opportunity to which they may be admitted and to any eminence of responsibility to which they may be by Thy Providence promoted. AMEN.