

THE
EXCELLENCE AND INFLUENCE
OF THE
FEMALE CHARACTER:
A SERMON,

PREACHED IN
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN MURRAY-STREET,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE

New-York Female Missionary Society.

By GARDINER SPRING,

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SECOND EDITION.

NEW-YORK :
PUBLISHED BY F. & R. LOCKWOOD, 154 BROADWAY.
J. SEYMOUR, PRINTER, JOHN-STREET.
1825.

Southern District of New-York, ss.

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“The Excellence and Influence of the Female Character: a Sermon, preached in the Presbyterian Church in Murray-street, at the request of the New-York Female Missionary Society By Gardiner Spring, pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in said city”

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JAMES DILL,
Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

SERMON.

PROVERBS xxxi. 39.

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

THAT has been no unwary device of the great adversary, which has led so large portions of the earth, and so many ages of the world, to depreciate the worth and excellence of the female sex. I know there are spheres for which a female is not fitted, and from which the God of nature has proscribed her; and which, whenever she attempts to occupy, either in church or state, she betrays a weakness in the one, which derogates from her true dignity, and a presumption and self-complacency in the other, which tarnish the beauty of her holiness, and are incompatible with that meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God and man, is a pearl of great price. But I know, too, that the efforts which would condemn her to ignorance, and consign her to obscurity, constitute one of the most powerful engines of the Prince of Darkness, in riveting the chains by which he has bound the family of man, and perpetuating and extending his own relentless empire.

The Scriptures have not omitted a particular notice of the obligations and character of Christian

females. By instructions that are sometimes apparently incidental and sometimes of more set design, sometimes biographical and sometimes didactic, they frequently delineate and unfold the dignity and usefulness of the female sex, with unrivalled skill, impartiality, and effect. The chapter of the Proverbs which contains our text, peculiarly excels in the description and commendations of a virtuous woman. Having detailed the qualifications which constitute her excellence, he assigns her a very distinguished pre-eminence. "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."

There is a prominence given to my subject, in the very design of our assembling together. Standing as I do, as the organ of a society of females, the design of whose association is to propagate that gospel to which they owe their elevation in human society, I cheerfully yield to the inducement which the occasion presents, to suggest a few thoughts on the EXCELLENCE and the INFLUENCE of the female character.

In adverting to the EXCELLENCE OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER, it will occur to every mind, that the obvious designation of woman to a different sphere of action and influence, from that which is occupied by the stronger sex, suggests the contemplation of excellencies, which, though not peculiar to herself, are delightfully appropriate to her character and condition. There is a feeling of heart, a consciousness of dependence, a natural and amiable timidity, a tenderness and kindness, which unfit a woman for the rude and tumultuous occupations, and which, while they assign to her a more retired sphere, as clearly disclose those qualifications which constitute her true dignity and glory.

Among these, we hold in high estimation the virtues of INDUSTRY AND ECONOMY.

Did not these lie at the basis of a woman's usefulness, this would be too trite and common-place a remark. The wise man, in the chapter which contains our text, gives high importance to these useful qualifications. "She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." If there is a qualification in which a female ought to excel, it is a thorough and practical acquaintance with the arts and duties of domestic life. She may be ignorant of other branches of human knowledge, and deficient in more refined attainments with comparative impunity, but no embellishments can supply her deficiency in these. These constitute her peculiar and appropriate employment, and so far from being beneath her regard, do they adorn and beautify the most distinguished of her sex.

The sentiment may not exactly accord with the notions of the present age, but it is one that ought to be inscribed on the heart of every female, that industry and economy are her true glory. There is no apology for a slothful woman. A slothful woman is more fit for a domestic drudge, or the slave of an eastern despot, than for the elevated station which freedom, civilization, and Christianity have assigned her. A woman who is occupied in little else than receiving the courtesies of the other sex, and having every want supplied by obsequious attendants, if she does not become torpid by inaction, is almost always the victim of that morbid sensibility, which, while it

can weep over the ideal scenes of a novel or tragedy, has no interest in the affecting realities of human life, and passes through the world without communicating happiness, or acquiring respectability. Few appreciate the obligations, cares, and labours, of an industrious female; and few, I fear, are sensible of the perpetual self-denial which she is called to exercise in the performance of her laborious and reiterated duties. Her eye must be every where in her own proper sphere; her authority every where in her own retired dominion; her hand on every spring in all the departments of domestic labour. And a cheerful submission to this incessant watchfulness and care, constitutes one of the prominent excellencies of her character. A female that has been induced to believe she was made for nothing but to be beloved and admired, and who is never pleased but by the alternations of idleness and dissipation, has never learned to estimate her true worth and excellence, and is a stranger to the high destination of woman.

A WELL-CULTIVATED MIND also forms an essential ingredient in female excellence.

We have yet to learn that the Supreme Creator has denied to woman the same capacity for intellectual exertion, which he has communicated to man; and that with the same training, the same auxiliaries, and the same incitement, she might not maintain her equal progression in every enterprise that demands simply intellectual endowment. But this is a point of no easy decision, and of little utility could it be decided. There are those who so far depreciate the intellectual worth of females, as to believe that all that is important in female education, is limited by a thorough acquaintance with domestic philosophy: and

that to furnish our daughters with any accomplishments beyond this, and particularly to instruct them in any of the branches of solid learning and science, is a superfluity that ill befits their condition and employment.

But how contracted are such views, and how far do they fall short of qualifying females for some of the more useful and important duties of their sex! Mind is a glorious endowment; and there is no reason why the mind of a female should not be cultivated with unwearied assiduity. Particularly to a female of keen perception, intuitive judgment, vivid fancy, and ready and retentive memory, every facility of developing and improving her intellectual faculties, which her means and condition in life can furnish, should be afforded. I know of nothing which a woman may not study and acquire to advantage. If she is ambitious of deserving well, if she is diligent, as her experience and reflection become matured, I would not only have her well grounded in all the branches of a good English education, but I would delight to see her plodding her steady course through the departments of classical knowledge—introduced to the masters of science in every age—familiar with the history of other times and the biography of other men—well acquainted with the power of numbers—not meanly instructed in physical and intellectual philosophy—and especially, taught to think and reason, and to express her thoughts with propriety, force, and elegance. No reason exists why the Temple of Science should be interdicted to an enterprising female, and why its ascent should be deemed so rough and difficult, that her modest foot may not attempt it. Every step she gains will reward her exertion, and facilitate her progress: and though it may not be her

ambition to flourish in the republic of letters, yet if she would be esteemed and honoured in human society, and become one of its most invaluable blessings, she need not fear extending her acquisitions.

But while we advert to her intellectual cultivation, let us not lightly pass over the peculiar advantage of a thorough acquaintance with *moral science*. Here, every female should be at home. Last of all, should the science of God, and salvation, and immortality, be hidden from her eyes;—last of all, should she be a stranger to the principles and obligations which ought to govern her thoughts, her affections, and her conduct, every hour and moment of her existence. How humiliating, if it were only in an intellectual view, that she should be ignorant of the topics and wonderful themes of contemplation, and powerful persuasives of enterprise, and unrivalled exhibitions of classical beauty and elegance, and matchless examples of purity of thought, with which the great text-book of moral science, the BIBLE, is so richly fraught! There, is revealed what nothing else has disclosed, and what none but God knew. From one page of this wonderful volume, a female may gain more knowledge of the great end of her being, and of what is useful and necessary to be known, than philosophy could acquire by the patience and toil of centuries. There, too, is developed the great system of truth, which philosophers and sages have sought in vain,—every where inculcating the most excellent maxims of wisdom,—every where embodying counsels more paternal, admonitions more alarming, consolations more precious, expostulations more touching, than all the schemes of human instruction; and every where recounting events and transactions, that cannot be communicated without

the deepest interest and delight. The wonders of the Bible have interested and amazed the strongest intellects in creation. And if a female would be interested in subjects that can expand, and captivate, and transform, her mind,—that can crucify her affections to the pursuits and enjoyments of the world; then must her heart be endeared to the excellencies of the Bible.

All these courses of study will strengthen and cultivate her intellectual powers, and fit her for usefulness. And if she be pious, how is her character invested with additional power, when it can put in requisition the force and furniture of a well-disciplined and richly cultivated mind. The greater variety of intellectual accomplishments she possesses, the more respectable will she become, and the more influence will she exert in any sphere she is destined to occupy.

I may remark further, that NEATNESS AND TASTE are peculiarly ornamental to the female character.

In a female, particularly, they well deserve the name of virtues; for without them, whatever may be her excellencies, she has none that will be honoured or acknowledged. A woman may be industrious and economical; she may possess a well cultivated and richly furnished mind; but destitute of neatness and taste, she depresses rather than elevates the character of her sex, and poisons, instead of purifying, the fountain of domestic and public happiness.

Whatever a misinformed piety may judge, true piety, well informed, is the nurse of every personal and social virtue. Religion has not unfrequently lost her pure and benignant influence, by needlessly ar-

raying herself against all those personal accomplishments, which, though not the first, constitute one of the appropriate and important duties of the female sex. You may discover a neatness and taste in the very *mind* of a praiseworthy woman, be her condition in life ever so humble. You shall see them interwoven with her thoughts, expressions, and conduct, and giving a cast to every thing she is, and every thing she does. Her *manners* will partake largely of these excellent qualities, and in every respect be the emanation of a neat and polished mind, and a well cultivated and benevolent heart. Equally removed from that affectation of softness, which is disgusting and nauseous, and that intrepidity, which sets at defiance the maxims of ordinary discretion, they will be modest, pleasing, and dignified, and the natural and unstudied expression of that cautious delicacy, which is the best guardian of female reputation. Her *dress* should obviously accord with the same mental cultivation and refinement. Comfort, neatness, and taste, ought always to distinguish it. Nor is there any reason why Christian females should be inattentive to their apparel. "Let it ever be remembered, that we live under a dispensation which grants considerable liberty, in respect to many external circumstances ; that an excessive strictness about trifles leads to the neglect of substantial things ; and that as the 'kingdom of God is not meat and drink,' so neither does it consist in any peculiarities of apparel, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost."* I am by no means pre-

* Christian Observer for 1806, p. 472.

pared to subscribe to the sentiment, that a woman should mark her Christian principles by any singularity in her dress. There are few things more preposterous, or anti-christian, or that have led to more censurable results. A Christian woman ought to be distinguishable by her simplicity, her neatness, her economy, her healthful and becoming attire, but never by her stiffness and precision. Nor does the gospel proscribe all ornament in the article of clothing. It does, indeed, prohibit that profusion of ornament, which consists in a studied display of personal decorations and costly array. But no where does it interdict that decent regard to external appearance, which gives respectability to the female character. A woman without respectability is without influence; and without influence, she is without the power of doing good. Nor do I hesitate to say, that it is no part of the religion of the gospel for a female to be very scrupulous in avoiding the common modes of apparel. I believe there is much more anxiety, and much more attention to dress, and much more sin in studiously avoiding them, than in naturally falling in with them. Fashions, which characterise a gay and worldly circle, a Christian woman will avoid. But how ridiculous would she appear, to disregard the spirit of the age, and cleave to the habiliment of her ancestors, while the prevalent modes of dress among persons of her own class, are not inconsistent with modesty and decorum. And let it not be forgotten, that there is no intrinsic evil in mere dress of any kind. So long as the heart is not corrupted, nor the best interests of men injured by the garments we wear, they are of little account in the sight of God. And is there no reason to believe that vanity may insi-

nuate itself into the mind from the love of plainness and singularity? Do we not all know enough of human nature to be satisfied, that a woman who is habitually well dressed, thinks less of her apparel than the woman who is well dressed only occasionally, and whose thoughts are incessantly occupied about the dress of her neighbours? An Indian may be as vain of her blanket, and a Quaker of her bonnet and cap, as a coxcomb is of the newest fashion, or a courtier of his splendid retinue. And what would become of the interests of society, if you proscribe all the ornaments and conveniences of dress? To what untold multitudes do these give useful employment? How large a portion of the church of God do they elevate above want and suffering? How many benevolent institutions are maintained in existence by the industry of females, in forming articles of mere ornament and fancy? And how many *streams of charity* do they fill, which, without them, would be dry?

I should be loath to have these suggestions misunderstood or perverted. I plead not for excess and profusion in apparel. Extravagance and finery in dress I would censure and condemn. A fop, or a belle, I would hold in steady contempt. All attention to personal appearance which excludes higher and more important objects from the mind, is inconsistent with a pure religion. Against the splendour, gaiety, and fickleness of fashions, the pure and unassuming influence of christian piety is natively arrayed. And vanity, splendour, and extravagance in clothing, are the result of a vitiated taste, and never become the person half so well as a beautiful simplicity and neatness. But while I say this, I cannot believe that the religion of the gospel requires

that we should have no regard to the feelings and opinions of human society, or that we should divest ourselves of that self-respect, which renders us respected and useful in the world.

It is possible these thoughts may offend. But sure am I, they present no cause of offence to the most self-denying mind. There is a spirit in some of our most excellent females in relation to the article of dress, that requires a more prayerful self-examination than it has received. For myself, I do not believe there is any thing praiseworthy in that spirit of female curiosity, which interferes with the dress of her fellow-christians, and would reduce the taste of the community to any one standard. And I have always found that those females who are the most officious in these matters, are, with few exceptions, the very persons who would lead the fashion, if it were in their power. To such persons I would say, the spirit of God affirms of a virtuous woman, that “all her household are *clothed in scarlet*; that she maketh herself *coverings of tapestry*, and that her *clothing is silk and purple*.”

And the same neatness and taste which ought to be discoverable in a lady's person, ought to be seen in her family, her residence, her furniture, and that whether it be ample and rich, or scanty and poor. There is a degree of these virtues which ought to pervade a woman's entire sphere, and without which, society would degenerate into the barbarism and violence of the dark ages. And hence this elevation of character is always one of the effects of christianity upon barbarous nations. It is a sad misconception, that the law of God excludes every thing that is refined and ornamental, and restricts human

enjoyments merely to what is necessary for human subsistence. Coarse and depraved indeed, would be that society in which there is nothing for the ease and convenience of life. So long as mankind have a social as well as a moral nature, the cultivation of an elevated and refined spirit in the female sex, deserves a place among her obvious excellencies. But I will add,

Of all others, PERSONAL PIETY forms the distinguished excellence of the female character.

“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but the woman that *feareth the Lord*, she shall be praised.” The virtues to which we have already alluded, are the glory of a woman, but piety constitutes the crown of her glory. I speak not of that piety which exists only in name, but of that which has its seat in the heart; which subdues the native alienation of the mind to God and holiness; which transforms and new creates the soul; and which concentrates its faculties, and concentrates them for ever upon the living God as its portion. Religion in woman, as well as in man, is not only “of the operation of God,” but the result of reflection, comparison, and choice, and consists in a cheerful and happy renunciation of all the heart holds dear, for Jesus Christ, and of every opposing interest for his kingdom and glory. And this is her distinguished excellence. Let the fear of God, and the love of Jesus Christ control her domestic virtues; let the humility, patience, faith, hope, charity and resignation of the gospel, become interwoven with her personal accomplishments, and sweeten and govern her conduct; and how lovely is such a woman! It has frequently been remarked, that “pious women are not only more numerous, but more pious than pious men.” In a woman, piety is more apt to

be uniform and persevering, amid multiplied obstacles, and accumulated discouragements. And if she possesses large measures of grace, her religion will be more ardent, than the religion of the other sex. Such was Hannah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna; and such have been a multitude of others, of whom the world was not worthy. If woman was first in transgression, she is most lovely in her penitence. If she was first in her infidelity, she is most faithful in her attachment—"last at his cross, and earliest at his grave." Hers is the piety which purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. Hers is the piety which raises the eye and heart to God; which consecrates to him those ardent affections, that youth, that beauty, and that pride of life. Hers is the piety which urges to the unbending attachment to every truth, the assiduous cultivation of every grace, and the diligent and self-denying performance of every duty. Add to the excellence of such a woman, all the peculiar excellencies of her sex—all that native tenderness and kindness—all that cheerfulness and sweetness of disposition—all that untiring patience and submission to suffering—and all that immutable love, in which she has a glorious superiority over the other sex; and as you contemplate her virtues, tell me, what empire has true excellence on the earth like the bosom of such a woman. Or if you will contemplate her character in a more advantageous light still, behold religion not only combined with all the peculiar excellencies of her sex, but gradually exterminating all her peculiar faults and foibles—subjugating her spirit of unworthy curiosity—eradicating her spirit of envy and detraction—softening her spirit of fretfulness and complaint—and elevating to things unseen, her worldly mind; and how inestimable such a woman! How

infinitely superior are her charms to all the fascinations of beauty, all the splendour of external accomplishment, and all the "delirious joys of giddy dissipation!" How invaluable does such a woman appear, adorned and dignified, not only by all that earth can give, but decked in the robes of that piety and loveliness, which earth can neither give nor take away.

Such are some of the qualifications which appear to me to constitute the excellence of the female character.

The INFLUENCE of such a female now deserves our consideration.

It is not a trivial thought, that UPON HERSELF ALONE, such an assemblage of virtues exerts an influence of the most enviable kind.

Such a woman, you at once perceive, be her condition ever so elevated, or ever so humble, has the resources of happiness within her own bosom. Let her vicissitudes in human life be ever so numerous and painful, she possesses excellencies which remain unaltered, when the adulations of the world have become cold and reluctant, when the charms of beauty are fled, and the attractions of earthly splendour have passed away. These are the excellencies which lift her above that depressed condition, which is the allotment of many an unhappy female, who has few objects of pleasing reflection or desirable anticipation to cheer and revive her heart; and whether she looks backward or forward, cannot resist the impression, that she lives almost in vain. An active, well-informed, devout woman, while she possesses and cultivates a deep impression of her dependence as a creature, and her

unworthiness and ill-desert as a sinner, is comforted in the consciousness that she holds an important place in the creation of God. It is a delightful gratification to her tender and amiable heart, that the talents with which the God of heaven has intrusted her, are not buried in a napkin, and that while the stronger sex are busied in prouder and less noiseless enterprises, she too is living to some good purpose. Adverse fortune, though even in its most direful and terrific forms, does not so far prostrate her courage, but her buoyant mind, fortified by the habits of thought and the comforts of piety, may delight itself in reflecting on what is past, or pursuing some interesting and agreeable object, the attainment or prospect of which supports, if it does not satisfy, her soul. A virtuous woman is not destitute of her reward in the present world, but a far greater and better is preparing for her. While others, whose consequence has fled with their youth and beauty; whose respect and honour have passed away with their rank and fortune; and whose peace of mind has vanished with the admiration and applause of the world, have found thorns upon their dying pillow, and exchanged their laughter and joy for everlasting mourning and heaviness; she, whether she come to her grave like a shock of corn in its season fully ripe, or in the tenderness and flower of early years, shall bloom in all the vigour of a growing immortality, because “found in the way of righteousness.”

But the influence of such a woman is still more observable amid the ENDEARMENTS AND DUTIES OF CONJUGAL LIFE.

Man is formed for society. The great Creator, whose all-seeing eye surveyed all the peculiarities

and exposures of the human character in every age of time, and who well knew how to appreciate the loneliness and depression of single life, and all its train of concomitant evils, very early uttered, "It is not good for man to be alone." And lest this sacred institution should become the sport of fools, and its unblotted purity the mirth of thoughtless and vicious men, He himself has pronounced its eulogium, and in the same breath thrown around it the shield of his guardianship, in that memorable sentence, which commends it as "honourable in all," and affirms that he "will judge" its foul abusers. It is in the matrimonial relation, that the best affections of the human heart are found to exist in their purity and sweetness; and here are proved the most elevated joys of which our lapsed nature is capable. No similitude beneath the skies so delightfully represents the sacred and holy union between Christ and his church, the happy espousals between the child of grace and the condescending and loving Redeemer, as the union which subsists between the husband and the wife.

And it is in this relation that a virtuous woman exerts her persuasive and powerful influence. It is impossible to describe the extent of her agency. The character and usefulness of men is never known, until something is ascertained of the influence to which they will be subjected in the conjugal relation. I would never abandon an abandoned youth, while there is any hope that his heart may be enchained by a virtuous woman; and I would never calculate with confidence, what course the most promising or pious young man will pursue, or what influence he will ex-

ert in the church or in the world, until something is known of the influence which will animate or discourage him; which will extend or limit his usefulness; which will give prominence and character to his exertions, or neutralize them all; and which, like his patron deity, has an altar in his bosom, whose flame is never extinguished.

The influence we are contemplating is all of the best kind. And what shall be said of the influence of a wife, whose constant and uniform virtues reflect their amiable and attractive lustre on the character of her husband? Such a woman is above all praise. Unlike those unhappy females, who are little else than "toys to amuse a husband's vacant hours," or slaves to subserve his wants, she is his happy and rational companion. Affectionate, beloved, and respected, her favourite wish and delightful employment is, to render him respected, useful, and happy also. Solomon describes her in terms of no extravagant commendation, when he says, "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. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land." There is a oneness of soul, a community of interests, an identity of circumstance and condition, between her and her husband, which such a woman improves to the best advantage, and never fails to subordinate to his highest good. Is he prosperous? All his enjoyments are doubled and multiplied when shared by her; and in her gratified participation, every prospect becomes light and gladsome. Is he embarrassed and depressed by the perplexing and

wearisome cares of life ? How are his toils forgotten, and how do the hardships and fatigues which beset his course, lose their severity, when rehearsed in her attentive ear, and reposed on her kind and faithful bosom. Is he the child of sorrow, and do afflictions and distresses pour their bitterness into his cup ? How are his trials alleviated, his sighs suppressed, his corroding thoughts dissipated, his anxieties and pains relieved, his gloom and depression chased away, by her cheerfulness and love. Is he overwhelmed by disappointment, and mortified by reproaches ? There is one who can hide her eyes even from his faults, and who, like her Father who is in heaven, can forgive and love “without upbraiding.” And when he is sickened by the subtleties and deception of the world ; when the acrimony of men has made him acrimonious ; when he becomes dissatisfied with himself, and all around him,—her pleasant smile, her undissembled tenderness, her artless simplicity, “restore him to himself, and spread serenity and sweetness over his mind.”

But this is not all. Her wisdom and kindness not unfrequently transform his moral character. That man must possess a hardy temperament, whose licentious mind cannot be withdrawn from the seductions of vice and folly, by the discretion and piety of an affectionate wife, and who cannot look upon the allurements of the world as divested of all their charms, by the innocent endearments he finds at home. When every excellence is concentrated in the person of the female whom he has chosen in preference to all other women to be his bosom companion, what attractions can a reasonable man have to mingle with the snares of corrupt

and corrupting society? And with what tender and mighty persuasion may such a wife allure her husband to the paths of heavenly wisdom! How difficult is it for him to cast off fear and restrain prayer, and to remain thoughtless and unconcerned for his own soul, while he discovers her solicitude that he should participate in the privileges and hopes of piety. How often does her example reprove him, her tenderness melt his hard heart, her kind and unobtrusive entreaties embarrass him in his downward career, her prayers bring him back to God and heaven. How many a husband has thrown himself within the ranks of God's covenant people, and under the guide and shelter of the pillar and the cloud, moved on with them toward their destined inheritance, through that tender solicitude with which the mind of a pious wife has yearned over him, that pathetic sympathy which he has seen so often ready to burst over his melancholy condition and prospects, as an alien from the commonwealth of Israel. And when such a woman is wedded to a man of worth and piety, what an help-meet for him through all his course in this wayward world! What vigour and courage do her piety and zeal impart to his in all their celestial career. How does her prudence restrain, her fervour enkindle, her constancy inspire, her sweetness attract, her uniformity and self-denial reprove him, and her heavenliness discountenance and subdue his worldly mind. The pleasures and the benefits of social piety are no where enjoyed in greater purity, than in the matrimonial relation. How enviable that chamber of devotion where such a happy pair daily bow their knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and where, to consummate their devout

union, the angel of mercy descends with a coal from off the altar to light their sacrifice. How happy thus to take sweet counsel together, and go to the house of God in company! Who would complain of the cross when bearing it with such a helper? Who would deem the way toward Zion, rugged, tedious, or mournful, when travelling with such a comforter and friend?

But we may contemplate the influence of such a woman, not merely as a wife, BUT AS A MOTHER AND AT THE HEAD OF A FAMILY.

The sentiment has often been expressed, that in the whole business of forming the character of children, the mother is the more important parent. The education, the government, the piety, the usefulness of the rising generation, depend chiefly on the mother. The earliest impressions are the most vivid, strong, and permanent; and hence the human character is chiefly formed in childhood.

Napoleon once said to *Madame Campan*, "The old systems of education are good for nothing—what do young women stand in need of to be well brought up in France?"—"Of MOTHERS," replied this intelligent and accomplished lady.* The reply speaks volumes. View such a female as we have described, surrounded by a numerous offspring of sons and daughters, herself possessed of every domestic, intellectual, and moral accomplishment which qualify her to interest and instruct them, and to become the object of their love and confidence, and the centre of attractions to the little world that is rising around her. See her almost constantly with her children by

* Biographical notice of *Madame Campan*, prefixed to her memoirs of *Marie Antoinette*.

night and by day. Her condescending tenderness promotes the habits of unrestrained familiarity. Her children feel that they have an easier and more ready access to her ear and bosom than those of their father. To their infant minds "she imparts her manners, her habits, her modes of thinking, her opinions, her prejudices, her virtues, I had almost said, her very soul itself." And during their progressive maturity, she may form them almost as she pleases. And even after they have arrived to years of independence, they feel no restraint like the wishes of a mother. That tongue of hers, in which is "the law of kindness," shall "drop as the rain, and her speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the mown grass."

Hence a mother of this combined excellence, is apt to exert a more efficient authority over her children than the other parent. The stern government of the father, in such a family, is rarely resorted to, because her wisdom and gentleness, her wakeful discretion and unwasting patience, assume the more benignant control. Many a youth of rash and impetuous temperament, would venture to break the strong bonds of paternal discipline, while his heart would fail him in rudely bursting the cord that binds him to a mother's bosom.

And hence it is, that the moral and religious character of children is so deeply indebted to pious mothers. A well informed and pious mother, even when left to struggle with this responsible and arduous duty unaided by the intelligence or piety of the father, usually accomplishes what no father can accomplish, unaided by the intelligence and

piety of the mother. The faithful and devout attention of a father, is not without a powerful influence; and yet how few are there who remember a father's care and anxiety, as the means of their conversion, compared with those who gratefully recollect the unwearied solicitude and prayerfulness of a pious mother.

What a host of worthies, who have been the instructors of the world, and the guardians of its best interests, have dwelt with ineffable tenderness on the sacred name of *Mother*! It was the tender affection and faithful care of a pious mother, that prepared the prophet Samuel to be the minister of salvation to the church in every age. It was the piety and instruction of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, that educated Timothy to be the associate of Paul in converting the nations. When I learn that the mother of Philip Doddridge, "before he could read, taught him the history of the Old and New Testament, by the assistance of some Dutch tiles in the chimney of the room where they usually sat;" and when I am told that "the instructions which his pious mother gave him before he was four years old, fastened an impression on the conscience of the late venerable John Newton, which cleaved to him through all his subsequent licentiousness, till he became an eminent believer and preacher of that gospel which he had despised;" I feel the weight of the sentiment, that "though her station is subordinate, yet in a great measure, a mother carries in her heart, and holds in her hand the destinies of the world." I could mention other men and other mothers, whose benignant influence has been felt through a long line of descendants, and whose useful-

ness will not be revealed till the final restitution of all things. The name of *mother* vibrates on my heart. *One* I knew, of blessed memory, whose tender affection was never weary, and to whose sentiments of faith and piety, often whispered in the ears of a reluctant son, is it to be attributed, more than to any other means, that unto him who is the least of all saints, is this grace given, that he should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Who can estimate the value of one devout, devoted mother? Who can limit the influence of woman in such a sphere? I pity woman, but I honour her. I know the reproach of woman, but still more do I know her honours. Next to their rejection of the Son of Mary, do I esteem it the deepest reproach of Jewish men, that in their daily prayers, they thank the God of Abraham, they were not born women! Yes, my friends, it is an honour to be born a woman. Of what avail are the authority, and power, and laws of nations, compared with the silent influence of woman? Who is more justly honoured than the mother of children who have been the benefactors of the world? This influence and honour are the blessing of many an humble and ennobled female. What was the high and honest exultation of the Roman Cornelia, exhibiting her Gracchi, compared with the gratified faith and piety of many a christian mother, as she points to her sons and daughters, and says, These are my treasures—these are the children which God has graciously given me.

But there are *domestic relations of a less important kind*, which an accomplished female sustains with

distinguished benefit to all around her. As a *daughter*, every member of the family with which she is associated, acknowledges the power and purity of her character. Her industry, her discretion, her piety, her dutiful and kind demeanor, diffuse a savour which is like the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded his blessing. Daughters who are thus qualified to fill the stations they occupy, are beautifully compared by the sacred penman, to “corner stones” in a splendid edifice, that are “polished after the similitude of a palace.” As a *sister*, the influence of such a female is scarcely less desirable. The reason why sisters so often exert a lamented influence over one another, and over their brothers, is, that they are not qualified to exert a better. If instead of devoting their attention to mere external accomplishments, and a very limited course of intellectual attainments, they would aspire after solid improvements and durable virtues; if instead of being absorbed in the love of ornament and admiration, they would aim at accomplishments that ennoble the mind, dignify the person, and meliorate the heart; how easy would it be for them to give their own domestic circle the pre-eminence above every other society, and within their own happy dwelling form each other’s habits and characters, so as to become ornaments and blessings to the world. Nor is the more humble condition of a *female servant*, who is qualified to fill her important station, to be esteemed of little or no account. To what a multitude of families has the industry, the intelligence, the faith, the piety, the prayers, the example, of such a woman, even in this retired department, proved an

invaluable blessing. Very often, when unknown to herself, is she scattering the seeds of mercy. Many a parent and many a child, many a giddy daughter and froward son, has been kept from perdition by the timely efforts of a faithful servant. Are there none of you, my friends, in the higher walks of human society, who have been snatched as brands from the burning, by the instrumentality of a godly servant? Eternity only can disclose the extent of influence which a discreet and pious female may exert even in the humblest sphere.

But it is impossible for us to enter into all the detail we could desire in a single discourse. Such a woman as we have described, whatever may be her allotment, occupies an almost unlimited sphere of exertion. She may fill a prominent place in an extended circle of friends and associates, and there diffuse the savour of her virtues, and the blessing of her example. Like many a pious and faithful female, whom God has excluded from the obligations of the matrimonial bond, that she may exert a still wider influence, she may become the *teacher of youth*, and like Susanna Anthony, and Sarah Osborn, form the minds of a whole community, and give an impulse to the Christian world, that shall continue down to the last twilight of millennial glory. A very judicious writer remarks: "It has long been my decided opinion, that nature has peculiarly formed and designed the softer sex for the noble and delightful, though arduous and trying, office of teaching. They naturally possess a greater share of those excellencies which constitute a good teacher. More gentle, affectionate, and winning in their manner; more ardent, zealous, and persevering, in their efforts; more in-

teresting, endearing, and impressive, in their communications,—their operations upon the mind are more forcible and more efficacious. According to their opportunities of learning, they have probably been the more successful teachers. In proportion to the scanty compensation which they have received, they have undoubtedly done more in this office to promote the public good, than the other sex.”* And how does such a female shine, when her well directed agency is felt in a *Sabbath school*, and she there becomes the guardian and friend of parents and children, who, but for her, were destined to perpetuated ignorance and degeneracy. Or she may act a distinguished part in *religious and charitable institutions*, and encourage all around her in these labours of love, and animate them in every good word and work. Like another Dorcas, or another Graham, she may become the “radiating point of truth and grace,” and reflect her lustre to unborn ages, and embalm her memory in the grateful recollections of the church of God. I say, *the church of God*; for it is this sacred community that such a female adorns and beautifies. How has she watched over the heritage of her Redeemer, and sounded the alarm at its exposures, and shielded it from the aggressions of the enemy. How has her voice of prayer been lifted amid the circle of her female associates, and her benignant counsel allured and guided many a company of youthful believers. How have her hands administered to the necessities of the saints, and the

* A discourse, delivered at the Seminary Hall, in Saugus, by the Rev. Joseph Emerson, now the Principal of a female academy in Weathersfield, Conn.

avails of her industry and self-denial contributed to the increase and support of the ministry of reconciliation, to the extension of the Word of Life, and the introduction of the missionaries of the cross to lands far off and near. And if such a woman be regarded merely as *a member of civil society*, who does not feel her influence? She may imagine herself to be an obscure individual, and excluded from any share in the concerns of the great world, of which she is but a single inhabitant, while her capacious heart may embrace the best good of the community to which she belongs, while it may be her glory to live for the great interests of mankind, and while she may exert an agency that is felt to the remotest bounds of the globe.

The influence of the female character, it may not be concealed, has a predominant sway over human society. Public taste and manners, public virtues and vices, are under the control of woman. In the empire of fashion, her sway is absolute. And if woman were uniformly excellent, her influence in the empire of morals would be scarcely less visible. By that silent and winning influence which she exerts at home and distributes abroad, her unseen hand forms the character of men, and gives a complexion to the society and age, which nothing can resist. Let woman be virtuous, and it will be difficult for the world to be vile. Let woman be industrious and economical, and how few will be the persuasives for society to be indolent and luxurious. Let woman be intelligent and well informed, and it will be impossible for the community to be sottish and ignorant. Let woman possess the virtues of neatness and taste, and how can public feeling and sentiment degenerate into rude-

ness and barbarism. Let her be pious—O! let *woman* be *pious*—and how will this ungodly world feel the powerful constraints of redeeming mercy, and realize the vision which the revelator had, when he beheld the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband !

The female character, my fair auditors, is destined to rise, and not destined to fall. Unless new principles of the divine government remain to be disclosed, not yet developed in the word of God, or in his providence, the purposes of his love towards mankind cannot be accomplished without a very sensible elevation of the female sex. Females are yet to become some of the most distinguished instruments in the emancipation of the world, from the thralldom of ignorance and sin. On females themselves devolves in no small degree, the duty of elevating the character of their own sex. How they are to do this, it is no difficult matter to determine. It is by carrying a more thoroughly furnished mind and heart into the various spheres of usefulness peculiar to their sex and station, and there unfolding all the patience, self-denial, and energy of their character. I would have females ambitious of usefulness, of the best and most unexceptionable kind. Unsanctified attainment, I know, may only increase the pernicious and corrupting influence of a woman ; but when combined with moral and religious culture, it may be employed with consummate advantage to the church and the world.

It is this moral and religious culture, which you have assembled this evening, my friends, to patronise, and of which I desire to be particularly the advocate. I address you as a society bound and band-

ed together by the love of Jesus Christ, and for the most noble and sacred of purposes,—that of *sending the gospel to the destitute settlements of our extended country*. Never did woman appear more elevated than in this high calling. Well may the speaker congratulate himself on being the advocate of female piety on such an occasion as this. Woman has been little else than a prisoner, or a slave, where the celestial influence of a pure religion has not knocked off her chains, and proclaimed emancipation from her servitude. And woman, defenceless woman, needs the influence and support of piety. In all her fears and trials, in all her disappointment and fatigue, how frail, how baseless, the superstructure of her hopes, if the Eternal God is not her refuge. But with the God of Jacob for her help, how does poor, feeble woman triumph over the trials of apostacy, and the helplessness of her condition, and throw into the shades of oblivion, the patience, submission, and confidence of the stronger sex. I have often thought, that piety has been to women what it never has been to men. And how has its matchless power been evinced, especially in the storms of keen adversity! Many a time, while the quivering spirit of her hardy compeer has been shattered by the tempest, and when in painful apprehension, I have looked to see her frail form sink beneath the billows; has her heaven-invigorated countenance faced the storm, and her buoyant heart been fixed, trusting in the Lord. O! my young female friends, lift your youthful eye up to the Father of Lights, and however dark and heavy the clouds that may be about him, you shall descry some “bow of promise” around his throne. Heavy clouds and thick darkness may indeed be there. The days may

be few that are crowned with peace and joy. But O! there is every thing to cheer the mournful vale. Those indications of grace and faithfulness shall never withdraw their encircled lustre from the throne of God. Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, and that light shall never fade, that immortality shall never die.