

MINISTERS' WIVES.

The articles lately published in the CANADIAN SPECTATOR on the "Protestant Pulpit" have naturally suggested the topic of ministers' wives. Indeed, wives might well have been included in the articles: for, as when we say "pulpit," we understand also the man who fills it, so, when we say "minister," we must likewise understand the better-half of the good man. That is, we Protestants: for in spite of St. Paul's "right to lead about a wife," and the stubborn fact that St. Peter *had* a wife, our friends of Rome stoutly maintain the necessity of episcopal and presbyterial celibacy. Under the Jesuit system—a system of mission labor in its inception—one can understand the advantages of a man having no *impedimenta* when he was liable to be ordered off from Europe to Cathay at a moment's notice. Few women would have cared to share the chances in those early days of helping to make (*passive voice*) a missionary pie, or contribute to an *al-fresco* banquet amid the wilds of North America. Even St. Paul knew that his "right" would be an inconvenient one to exercise. Woman is essentially a home animal: and however much some women like to *gad* about, very few would care to be *led* about. No doubt it was this feminine disinclination that stopped short St. Philip's itinerancy through the seaboard towns of Palestine, when he came to Cesarea. He had to stay there: and there to give us one of the earliest examples of a good minister doing the work of an evangelist as heartily as a Paul in *his* sphere, and at the same time bringing up a family in such a way as even to be helpful in his Gospel work.

The Greek craze on this subject stands in curious contrast to the Latin. By some marvellous intellectual shunt, the Greek exegetes ran off the track at the point of the apostolic injunction against polygamy; and settled it forever that the *pater* should be literally "the husband of one wife." One he *must* have, and *only* one. This gives the lady a great advantage. If she does not get her own way, she can threaten to pine away and die, and straightway the poor *papa* is all obedience. Mormonism, on the other hand, gives the prophet and the elder special privileges in this regard, and "seals" to him an unlimited number of wives. It is not quite certain whether this is done as a reward of merit, and that the holy man may have abundant opportunity to leaven the community with his piety, or whether it is arranged for the benefit of the fair sex: that *as many women as possible* may get a good husband! The Protestant churches have hit the happy medium between these extremes, and give a minister as many wives as he chooses: only—one at a time! And there are few who do not avail themselves of the privilege. In fact, so ready are they for its exercise, that we generally are compelled to tie down our theological students with an obligation not to commit matrimony until they have ended their curriculum. Then, the cord being broken, the bent bow relaxes suddenly; and graduation, ordination, installation, and matrimony, follow in quick succession. The wooing is usually done as a co-incident of the college course; so as to lose no time.

Hence, "Ministers' Wives" is a broad and fruitful theme: and any man, like myself, of venerable age and world-wide travel, of extensive marital experience and large powers of observation, should be able to present some points of interest. And here let me guard myself from misconception. This paper has no connection with those alluded to on "The Protestant Pulpit of Montreal." None of the ladies herein spoken of must be looked for within a magic circle of One Hundred Miles round Montreal! Let no reader think therefore that he recognises a portrait. It will be at most that occasional and casual resemblance by which we are often perplexed and deceived.

For instance, a dozen readers may suppose that they know my friend James Ryckson's wife. James was a young curate in Middlesex County, who, being in sole charge, brought home to share his home and parish duties, a little lady of seventeen. The poor little doll was pretty and 'amiable': that is to say, characterless. She shrunk with nervous dread from contact with her husband's people; and wanted to reserve all her sweetness for himself. And James was obliged to tell them that Mrs. Ryckson could not visit: that she was too fragile to be brought in contact with all sorts of people. And when some murmured, he boldly told them that *he* was charged with the care of their souls; and not his wife. And as the murmurings grew louder, so did poor James. He said that when his wife married him she didn't marry the parish; that the stipend he received was for his services alone; that his wife ought to be no more in the parish than any other lady; &c. But they 'couldn't see it': and Ryckson soon found it convenient to exchange for a charge in North Ebor: where he and his Dora still fight it out on the same line. She is much the same vapid nonentity as ever; but the people understood the case from the first: they don't see much of Dora: and they don't want to. Still, as a minister's wife Mrs. Ryckson cannot be called a success. Neither can the stately Mrs. Sparling of the same town. *She* was never troubled with nerves: but she seldom gave the Doctor's parishioners more than the most distant of nods: and seldom—to use their own expression—"darkened their doors." Neither the Sunday-school nor the 'Dorcas Society' ever had its serenity or its arrangements disturbed by her. Undisturbed, she rolled on in her own affairs whether the people thought well or ill; till, in the course of the whirligig of time, Dr. Sparling rolled off to another 'sphere of labour' in a distant southern city.

Lingering in Ebor parvum, it is a pleasure to call to mind the bright and sunny helper of good bishop Pepys; who was recently translated to that see from the far-east of Labrador. Pepys has a treasure in his wife. A strong man himself in his diocese, she makes him stronger. Smiling and affable even to the humblest, she has yet the instinct of a true lady: and can mix with all sorts of petty people without belittling herself. Her kindness is in her heart rather than on her lips. She has the rare secret of maintaining her husband's dignity without boasting of or puffing him: setting constantly the example of deference to his opinions and wishes; and enforcing his teaching by her own glad acquiescence. Not less is the dear lady a helpmeet to her husband within doors. Few men anywhere, and very few in the ministry, breathe a healthier and happier home-atmosphere than bishop Pepys. Pepys may have a turbulent set to manage in his diocese,—I know he has—but whatever the weather without, he is sure of sunshine at home. Long may they be helpers of each other's joy.

In the same class may be placed the little woman who strengthens the hands and rejoices the heart of my friend Crownchild, of St. Stanislas, in the Northwest Territory. My friend himself is not without his parochial difficulties; although he has a fair proportion of the beauty and fashion of the Territory on his Church list. The people of that elevated region breathe the air of freedom, and are sometimes hard to manage. He who would drive the ecclesiastical chariot, must know when to give the horses their head and make them think they are not in harness, and when to pull a tight rein and make them feel the bit. Crownchild knows how to do this, perhaps, as well as any man. And his good wife knows how to help him. I have often admired the ready tact with which she manages the lady section of her husband's charge. She has the happy talent of being dreadfully interested in all feminine matters of Church-work, without damping the interest of the ladies. She can direct, while seeming only to suggest; and is even ready to adopt a good suggestion, and get others to do so. Wisely content with actual power and influence, she does not care for the show of it, and is quite content that Mrs. Trueman or Mrs. Wildman, or anybody else, shall think they are leading, when they are only following. Mrs. Crownchild is a woman of resources. I have, unfortunately, no word but *bonhomie* to give to her general bearing; but apart from this, she is equally at home in the sewing circle or the sick-room, in the Bible class or the confessional—that sweet and holy Protestant confessional of Christian privilege, which enables one to be the sharer of another's secret trials and sorrows and spiritual difficulties. A minister's daughter and a minister's wife, she knows her business within and without the house. Her children are rising up to call her blessed; the young people and the women of the Church make her their friend and confidant; while the men, equally at home with her, give her respectful admiration. If Crownchild should fail to hold his own, it will not be his wife's fault. The worst trouble is that, while there are no poor at St. Stanislas, there are little sets and circles which are pretty sharply defined; and it is hard for the best-intentioned minister's wife to be impartial in the distribution of her time and attentions.

I wish I could write down as an equal success the wife of the little bishop of the Episcopal Presbyterians in Dakota. Bishop Wynkyn is a genius in his way; and has a patent invention for securing a wife worthy of his most worthy self and his important position in the tribe. The Dakotans who attend St. Saulomon's were astounded when the venerable doctor presented as his second wife a smart, prim, blooming dainsel, younger than some of his own children. They thought it was a great mistake; but the bishop knew what he was about. The new Mrs. W. could learn from the former one; and so an object-lesson was speedily set up in the Cathedral in the shape of a shining marble tablet, which—a memorial for the dead—might educate the living to tread in her steps. There, as she sits in the family pew, Mrs. Wynkyn can ponder the virtues of her predecessor, and cherish the aspiration to have her own name added some day as the next "beloved wife." Meantime, she does her best; and is a most worthy, and I trust a happy lady; fairly liked and respected.

Mrs. Pennicuick is something of a character. Her husband is a pluralist; being the non-resident Rector of a poor parish in Eastern Labrador, while he actively presides over a faculty of the Hyperborean University. An excellent couple, they are well-matched; indeed, their only fault is that they are almost *too* good. Mrs. Pennicuick affects the "higher life," ardently patronizing the wandering evangelists who preach Perfectionism and the Second Advent. Well, it pleases her, and doesn't hurt her husband or any one else: and if she has not much influence, what she has is good.

Do second wives *always* improve upon the first? This is a question I should like to see worked out. It is so practical. For if so, then the man of many wives is increasingly blest. And how happy must old William Jay, of Bath, have been when his fourth wife led the good old man to the altar! Heaven bless the woman anywhere who gives herself to solace and comfort the old minister wearing out in his Master's service. It is a pretty sight to see her slender hand steadying his step, and smoothing his cushion, and watching upon his wants, and lovingly waiting upon him at home and abroad: his infirmities awakening her sympathy, and sympathy quickening her love: and the cords of their mutual affection strengthening as the years roll by. I raise my hat and bow my head to such a woman: and can only wish that all ministers had such wives. But alas! I know three men at this moment, whose wives are the trial and curse of their life. There is poor Hibernicus, constantly moving on from curacy to curacy, hunted out by the violence and malevolence of a bitter-tempered woman who renders life a very burden to him. Poor fellow: the last I heard of him he had buried himself in a little charge in the neighborhood of a pine forest somewhere towards the setting-sun. But he will have to move on—till the Pacific Ocean stops him. Moore is another man whose wife is a curse and as he has plenty of them (and a few greater ones) this keeps things particularly lively in the parish. Oldham Wall has a thorn in the flesh of the same character. But he has reached the point of callosity. He was never very thin-skinned, and has now a moral hide like a rhinoceros. When I saw him last winter, after a long separation, he was as erect and pompous and empty as ever. While on this subject, I must refer also to the hungry little American woman who is wife to old Dobson, of Johannisberg. She has but two topics of conversation: dress and dinner. It is as good as a banquet to listen to her description of one: especially of the "chicken fixins" and the pastry. Dobson is a really good fellow; but his wife is a little too much for him—and for his people. She will sponge anywhere for a feed; or hint loudly for a present of gloves, or lace, or even a new bonnet.

I would like to say a word about that scamp, Handyferry, who has a wife whom he treats like a brute, as he is: although his people won't believe it: the poor lady is pretty well crushed down: and talking about her will, of course, improve her lot. And I have no time to speak of the pastor's wife of the Hyr-ski-noi Church in Ekaterinesburg, in Western Russia. I could not say much about her, in any case; for, while a nice little woman enough, she is "not much to her."

But I must say a word about my old friend Gildhelm and his wife; and with that experience I will close. I have known Gildhelm any time these ten years; and have a great respect for him and his wife. G. had the misfortune