

MINISTERS' WIVES.

BY REV. W. W. SMITH.

We take it as a matter thoroughly settled among ourselves that the apostolic dictum "the husband of one wife," is neither to be taken that a "single" man is not to be employed in the public service of the churches, nor that a man once married, and bereaved, is to be prohibited from re-entering the married relation—but simply and only as prohibiting a plurality of wives. The rule ends there. It has its complete fulfilment in the observance of that prohibition. But there are a great many things inferred, where they are not direct. Nay, an inference is sometimes stronger than a direct assertion. We may take as an example that famous saying of Paul's, "If one died for all, then were all dead," or more correctly, "If one died for all, then all died." Here the universality of the atonement is not the direct subject of proof—it is only inferred; and an argument is built upon the reference. He refers to it as a great fact and doctrine already well known, and sufficiently proved and defended; and which he would not, just then, stop to again prove. So we have an inference here—that married men may be pastors, and pastors may be married men. Nay, Paul seems to assume that all the pastors would, as a matter of course, be married men—being chosen from among the more matured and experienced Christians—and gives directions and cautions respecting their family life and reputation.

We arrive then at this starting point; that a Christian minister may be a married man; that as a matter of fact, he may be expected to be a married man; and are prepared to advance to the question, "What kind of a woman should his wife be?" One general and invariable rule for all Christians is (and as ministers are representative Christians, very conspicuously for them), to "marry only in the Lord." A minister's wife, therefore, must be a Christian. But the definition is not exhaustive. A minister must be a Christian; but not every Christian is a proper person for a minister. In like manner, a minister's wife must be a Christian, but not every Christian woman is a proper person for a minister's wife. The question starts at once, "Why not?" And this leads us to further definition. We ask, "What should a minister seek for in a wife?" And no one answer will apply to all cases. As in other cases of Christian men and women, so in this. A man of a pronounced physical temperament wants a wife of a somewhat opposite temperament—that the one may be the complement of the other. A man who is all fire and energy, who promises fair to burn out and wear out in a few years, should have a wife who is restful, cool, placid, with good sense, and truest sympathy. A man whose conscience is often at war with his intellect and his volition, who is naturally indolent and dilatory, should find in his wife an active counterpoise—she should spur him up to activity and perseverance. These are general principles; and in the case before us these general principles must not be ignored. But there are also particular directions and cautions, applicable to the particular case. In Paul's directions to Timothy and Titus the hints as to the proposed bishop or deacon's family and wife, would not have been given if it were not to be taken into consideration as a factor in the choice of the officer in the church. And, we must conclude, that though, individually and personally, in every relation with the church and with the public, the men were qualified, yet eminent disqualifications in his wife or family would make his election to office improper and inexpedient.

And though it is true that a minister's wife has no public duties laid upon her more than upon other Christian women (with the exception, perhaps, of a more enlarged hospitality), yet her relation to her husband's character, and reputation, and work, inseparable from her position as his wife, renders imperative beyond all possible cavil, that she is to be "grave, not a slanderer, sober, faithful in all things."

Perhaps nowhere is "the falsehood of extremes"—as Tennyson phrases it—more conspicuously seen

than in two opposite theories about ministers' wives. The one theory is, that the minister's wife should do the work of a deaconess, visiting and counselling the sick and despairing—originate and preside over all charitable doings among the women of the church—teach and superintend either the infant class or the young women's Bible-class in the Sunday school, or if possible, both—and should, as a matter of duty on her part (seeing her husband is the salaried minister of the church), preside and be present at "Dorcas meetings," "mothers' meetings," and all such meetings. Now, the "falsehood" of this "extreme" is, that this is making the minister's wife a public servant—and a very active and responsible public servant—of the church, and to this there are two fatal objections. (1) The church has seldom the opportunity of *knowing*, and almost never the opportunity of *testing*, the qualifications of such a church-servant beforehand; she comes, just because the minister comes—not because she is selected and judged fit for such work. (2) She could not be "faithful in all things," if, having children at home requiring her Christian maternal care, she should neglect "her own house." And this she must needs do, to be director-general of all the female Christian work in the church. It must be some one who can be almost entirely spared from home duties, and who has besides, a peculiar qualification for such work, who is "called" by the Lord thus to labour. But it is a grand work, for a woman who has the time and the aptitude for it!

The other extreme is that sometimes (and I am afraid not always conscientiously and calmly) taken by some ministers, that if they please themselves in their marriage, and do their own personal and individual work somewhat faithfully and efficiently, the church and the world have no right to inquire what kind of a wife they have chosen! No man can be emancipated from rules that apply to the whole human race, and no Christian can, for one moment, sustain himself in a position which virtually claims freedom from Christian rule. A minister's wife is so intimately connected with his success, and right influence, and outside reputation, and is herself so potent an influence in determining him toward strong faith, and right endeavour, and every good thing wherein a minister of Jesus Christ ought to excel—or else, the contrary of all this—that it is a matter of great importance to the church, "what kind of a wife the minister has."

Her duties, like every other Christian matron, are chiefly at home. There her influence ought so to shine, that the "parsonage" becomes a model Christian home. Her truest influence will not be found in the church-meeting; not always even in the prayer-meeting, but reflected through her husband, her children, her guests, her unobtrusive sympathies and charities.

A foolish and unfounded prejudice exists with many (even Christian) parents, against any of their daughters "marrying a minister." It is one of the most senseless and cruel of prejudices. In a mere money point of view, the almost certainty is "neither poverty nor riches;" a quiet home, in very moderate circumstances. How much better is the average prospect outside the ministry? In business circles twenty men out of a hundred rise to wealth, and ten of them lose it again by speculations. In agricultural circles, fifty out of a hundred "do well," as it is called, but the life of the farmer's wife is a life of unintellectual depressing toil. The *beautiful* is all gone out of such a life. Not necessarily so, but I speak of things as they are. The minister's wife, with far less anxiety about her *position*—that is secured to her, and if she is a sensible woman, it will seem to her an agreeable one—and far less anxiety and apprehension about "fortune" and "success" and "means" and "solvency," than the wife of the business man, has a far better home than hers; better because more elevating discourse, higher aims, good books, good company, something to *live for*, and something to *do*; are found there, far more frequently. And, in comparison with the farmer's wife, she finds she has the continual opportunity and inducement to cultivate her intellectual and spiritual self—which opportunities are too often sadly lacking in the farm house.

There is the unnatural "itineracy"—which, if John Wesley had been married from the beginning, and happily married, he would never have recommended as a rule for the Christian ministry—which detracts something from the general estimate now made. But we must not judge of an institution by excrescences that have grown upon it, and the wives of the Methodist ministers would soon settle the question of itineracy if it was left to them!

And not at all remotely connected with this subject is the position of the pastors of a corrupt portion of the Christian Church, who are forbidden to marry, just as Paul prophesied of them (1 Tim. iv. 3). It is, I think, perfectly safe to hazard the assertion, that if, by a change in their polity, these men were allowed and encouraged to marry, and the marriage relation became as universal among them as among Protestant pastors, that the sweet amenities of home, the holy associations of the Christian family, in a few years, bring them over in thousands to Bible Christianity! An enforced celibacy, whether in army or Church, is but a gigantic hot-bed for cultivating vice; and where vice is, truth cannot flourish!

I have no novel theories to present. If women became bachelors of Divinity, or pastors of churches, they could not be mothers of families and good men's wives, and if such in any large number, the influence on the *family*, in the way of disparaging the influence of that divine institution would be disastrous. There are exceptional men now, just as there once was an exceptional Paul, who can do a glorious and special work, separated (and better because they are separated) from family ties. So there are exceptional women, who as nurses, physicians, authors, teachers—preachers even, and pastors—may do good and lasting work. But this is all exceptional, work and actors alike. The true place of a Christian woman is in a Christian home. And in most cases, the most enduring influence of a Christian matron on the world at large, has been through *her sons*, at least she has thought so, and the world has agreed with her. This field of influence is, in an unusual degree, open to ministers' wives. Their influence extends through a wider and more attached circle than that of the wives of any other class. Not only their own sons (and the theory of "ministers' sons turning out badly," is now exploded, exploded because thoroughly and carefully disproved), not only their own sons but other women's sons come under their good influence. And many a minister never knew how much influence he had among his people, nor where a *good deal* of that influence came from, till death took away his helpmeet, and with her much of hitherto undiscovered power. Our churches could ill do without—our parsonages and manses would largely cease to be centres of Christian *work* without, and our pastors would soon become jaded and spiritless and shorn of their *strength* without—good, patient, cheerful, unselfish, and every way admirable MINISTERS' WIVES!

DEBT.

On this subject Mr. Spurgeon says:

Living beyond their incomes is the ruin of many of my neighbours; they can hardly afford to keep a rabbit, and must needs drive a pony and chaise. I am afraid extravagance is the common disease of the times, and many professing Christians have caught it, to their shame and sorrow. Good cotton or stuff gowns are not good enough now-a-days; girls must have silks and satins, and then there's a bill at the dressmaker's as long as a winter's night, and quite as dismal. Show and style and smartness run away with a man's means, keep the family poor, and the father's nose on the grindstone. Frogs try to look as big as bulls, and burst themselves. A pound a week apes five hundred a year, and comes to the county court. Men burn the candle at both ends, and then say they are very unfortunate—why don't they put the saddle on the right horse, and say they are extravagant? Economy is half the battle in life; it is not so hard to earn money as to spend it well. Hundreds would have never known *want* if they had not first known *waste*. If all poor men's wives knew how to cook, how far a little might go! Our minister says the