

SHALL WE KNOW ONE ANOTHER?

AND OTHER PAPERS.

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NEW EDITION.
Fortieth Thousand.

CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO.
LONDON, PARIS & NEW YORK.
1885AD[?]

WORDS FOR WOMEN.



I HAVE often wondered what Bible-readers think of one particular chapter in the New Testament. That chapter is the last chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. What do they do with it? What do they get from it? What honey do they extract from its contents?

The last chapter of Romans is singularly full of names. The first fifteen verses are almost entirely taken up with greetings to persons of whom we know little or nothing. Many, I fear, are tempted to pass over them with a hasty glance, like the advertisement sheet of a newspaper, and to class them with the first chapter of Chronicles. "This is a barren land," they say to themselves; "there is little or nothing to be learned here."

Now, I believe that this way of viewing the last chapter of Romans is a great mistake. I believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and that every chapter is useful and profitable. I am one of those old-fashioned people who firmly hold that everything in the Bible is inspired. I have faith to believe that the hand of God is in the catalogues of Chronicles as well as in Rom. viii., or John xiv., xv., xvi., xvii. Believing this, I feel no doubt that there is a great lesson in Rom. xvi., and I will try to show what it is.

The chapter I have mentioned appears to me to contain a *special lesson for women*. The important position that women occupy in the Church of Christ—the wide field of real, though unobtrusive, usefulness that lies before them, if they will enter on it—the good service that they can do for Christ, if they have a mind—all these things seem, to my eyes, to stand out in the chapter, as if written with a sunbeam. I will proceed to show what I mean.

Observe, for one thing, that out of twenty-eight persons whom St. Paul names in concluding this precious Epistle, no less than eleven, if not twelve, are women.

Observe, for another thing, the manner in which St. Paul speaks of these women. He says of Phebe that she was "a servant of the Church" and "a succourer of himself." He says of Priscilla that she was his "helper in Christ Jesus"—of Mary, that she "bestowed much labour on him"—of Tryphena and Tryphosa, that they "laboured in the Lord" and of Persis, that she "laboured much in the Lord."

Now, I say there is much in all this to make us think. St. Paul was an apostle—a man chosen and called by Christ himself—a man eminently use-

ful in his generation—a man who possessed extraordinary gifts and singular fitness for his work—a man who seemed able, if any one ever was, to stand alone and do without the help of others; yet see how this great apostle openly declares his obligation to a few weak women? See how he is not ashamed to publish to the world that they had strengthened his hands and refreshed his spirit, and helped him forward in his work. Let every woman that reads this chapter mark these things, and inwardly digest them.

I will write plainly the thoughts that come across my mind, while I read of Phebe and her sisters in Rom. xvi. I think how wide is the field of usefulness which is open to professing Christian women: and I wish every Christian woman who may read this paper to lay it to heart. I say, then, that every woman may be most useful, if her heart is inclined to it. Every woman may do much, if only she is determined, and, like the Jews in Nehemiah's time, has "a mind to work."

I would not be mistaken in saying this. I am not speaking of public work. All cannot be district visitors. All cannot teach schools, and direct Bible classes. All have not the gifts of Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. Fry. All cannot write like Hannah More and Elizabeth Fry. Let those who have time, and gifts, and a clear call, give themselves to such work. But I speak of usefulness that all women can attain to—mothers with large families, wives with home engagements, daughters who must consult their parents' wishes rather than their own: and it is of them I say that every woman can do much.

I cannot away with the common notion that great usefulness is for men only, and not for women. Some women, I fear, come into this notion only too readily. I am afraid there is in some minds a kind of proud slothfulness that assumes the name of *humility*, and keeps people idle. Against this false humility let us always be on our guard.

A consistent Christian woman brings God before the eyes of those around her all the week long, whether they like it or not. She is "an epistle" that none can help reading.

It should never be forgotten that it is not preaching alone that moves and influences men. There is something to be done, as the Apostle Peter reminds us, "without the word" (1 Peter iii. 1), and none have the opportunity of doing good so much in this way as women. Humanly speaking, the salvation of a household often depends upon the women.

To bring men, for example, to attend the means of grace, and regularly hear the Gospel, is one grand object that a true minister sets before him. Every minister who "does the work of an evangelist" must know how difficult it is to get some people to attend. There are always obstacles raised and objections started. If the men come one month, they do not come the next. It reminds one of our Lord's expression, "compelling them to come in."

And what is the reason of this? Often, far too often, I firmly believe, the simple account is discouragement from wife or mother at home.

If women ask me in what way they can be useful, I answer, unhesitatingly and decidedly, first and foremost, by encouraging religion at home. Show your father, or husband, or brother, that you take a pleasure in seeing him attend to his soul. Let your manner and your words show him plainly that you want to help him forward and not keep him back. Let your household arrangements be so managed that he shall see you will make any sacrifice rather than keep him from the house of God.

The fire of good inclination often burns very faintly in the conscience of a hardworking man. Let his wife or mother see that she stir and feed it. Let her beware lest she be a wet blanket to put it out. The road of religion is a rough and up-hill journey. Let her strive to take up every stumbling-block, so far as in her lies. The cup of self-denial is a bitter one to weary flesh and blood. Let her labour, as far as possible, to make it sweet.

But, after all, there are a hundred little ways in which a woman can be useful in her own home, of which time would not allow me to speak particularly. Much is to be done by kind tempers, by gentle words, by meekness, by patience, by unselfishness, by attention in little things, by considerateness about little peculiarities, by thoughtfulness about little wants, by bearing with infirmities, and by “not answering again.” All these things tell in the long run. These are the constant dropping which can wear away the stone, the daily returning habits which influence men’s minds. Whatever women may fancy, men’s character is exceedingly influenced by their homes. Tell me the general character of a man’s home, and I generally know something of the man.

It is a true saying, and a sad one, “Cold homes make full public-houses.” I firmly believe that disorder, unkindness, and ill-temper at home drive many a working man into bad company, and make him seek relief in drinking, or frivolous amusements. I have sometimes gone into the homes of poor men late in the evening, and found everything in confusion just before the husband came in from work—children dirty, unfed, and crying—nothing ready, nothing comfortable, nothing in its place. In such a case, I cannot wonder if the husband turns out ill. I am persuaded the true account of many a poor sot I see is just this—“made a drunkard by his wife.”

If a woman would be useful, let her strive to make her home a happy one. Whether she be mother, wife, or daughter, let her make this her aim, that all the members of the family shall say, “There is no place like home.”

Let her strive to make the evenings of the day pleasant. It is the time when most men are wearied and worn with the labour of the day. A wise woman will endeavour to have a stock of cheerfulness in reserve for that time. Ah! these may seem small things to some readers. But you have much

to learn of human nature, if you do not know the difference it makes to a tired husband, father, or son, if he finds a cheerful, pleasant, smiling face at home.

If a woman would be useful, let her look well to her home duties. Whatever place she may fill in a family, let her resolve that by God's help, she will fill it well. I count it nothing for a woman to be active out of doors, however good her work may be, if she does not at the same time, glorify God at home. Home is a woman's peculiar sphere, and let home, therefore, have her first attention. She ought to endeavour to keep all the machinery of the family in perfect order. She must try to help, to counsel, to restrain, to direct, according as need may require. She ought to make her husband, or father, or son, or brother feel that all is going on well in his absence—a post for everyone, and everyone at his post. There are a hundred little things in every family which need daily attending to, and none can attend to them so well as women. Little as they are they can harass and vex a man's mind; and if he can be freed from their burden by a woman's thoughtfulness, it is no little gain to the peaceful working of the family. The scratch of a pin may be a trifle, but it can keep an elephant awake. Paul mentions it as a special duty of a woman, that she should “guide the house.” It is said of the excellent woman in Proverbs, that the heart of her husband “doth safely trust her”—he knows that all is going on well while his back is turned. It is a high character that is given of Sarah, when Abraham could reply at once to the inquiry, “Where is Sarah?”—“Behold, in the tent.”

If a woman would be useful at home, let her watch well her opportunities of doing good. If she would do good to the soul of husband, father, or brother, let her pray continually for the spirit of wisdom and discretion. Of all people she ought to remember that there is “a time to be silent,” as well as “a time to speak,” and to know the one from the other. She must not appear to set herself up as a teacher of men. There is a foolish pride about a man that makes him kick at the idea of a woman showing him anything he ought to know; and a woman who would do good must never forget that. She must try to win, not to compel; she must endeavour to draw, not to drive. A wife would be acting very foolishly who began preaching the Gospel to her husband when he came in tired, wet, and hungry, without allowing him to rest, to clean himself, or to get refreshed. A sister would find her advice little valued by her brother who thought it proper to give it before company. A mother would be most unwise who gave her sons a severe lecture on the sin of drunkenness at the very moment when they came home intoxicated. Abigail showed her wisdom in not speaking to Nabal while he was full of drink; she knew that her words would be wasted on him, and waited till the morning. The wife of Samson might have known she would lose her hold on her husband's affections by teasing and vexing him in the

days of the marriage feast. Esther watched her opportunity for speaking to her husband; she waited for the door to be made open for presenting her petition, and so gained her end. The saying of Solomon should never be forgotten: "A word spoken in season, how good is it!"

A woman who would be useful in her own home must be careful to encourage the smallest beginnings of religion in those about her. The first actings of grace are often exceedingly small, so small as to escape observation. The first growth of gracious inclination in a soul is often very slow, very easily checked; and if checked, perhaps retarded for years. No man can tell the importance of cherishing the first movings and drawings of the heart towards God. It may be only a willingness to hear, or a readiness to join in prayer, or a different treatment of the Bible; and yet this may be the first step that will lead on at last to a close walk with God. Blessed are those women who lend a helping hand at such a turning-point in a soul's history, and take up even the smallest stumbling-block out of its way? Coldness and want of sympathy often throw the inquiring soul back. Happy is the man who has any near him to say, like Leah and Rachel, "Whatsoever the Lord hath said unto thee, do."

I bring these things forward as seeds of thought. I hope that all women who read them will consider and think them over. I want them to understand how much they can do, how much depends on them, and how great is their responsibility in the sight of God.

Of course it would be easy to add to this paper. I might speak of the vast field of usefulness which is open to women in the training of children. It is not too much to say that the first seven years of life depend entirely on mothers and nurses. The first seven years contain the foundation of character for life. The first seven years of young England are in the hands of women!

I might speak of what women may do in the matter of visiting the poor and ministering to the sick. There are hundreds of cases continually arising in which a woman is a far more suitable visitor than a man. She need not put on a peculiar dress, or call herself by a Roman Catholic name. She has only to go about, in the spirit of her Saviour, with kindness on her lips, gentleness in her ways, and the Bible in her hands, and the good that she may do is quite incalculable. Happy indeed is that parish where there are Christian women who "go about doing good." Happy is that minister who has such helpers.

I conclude this paper by asking any woman who is not convinced by what I say to take up the Bible and run her eye over the histories it contains. If she wants proof of the influence that women have in their hands, let her notice how women leave their marks at almost every step in God's Word.

Their influence, I freely grant, has not always been for good. But influence they have had, and influence they will have, as long as the world stands.

Eve in the garden of Eden, the daughters of men before the Flood, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Potiphar's wife, Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter, Jethro's daughter, Rahab, Jael, Deborah, Jephthah's daughter, Delilah, Ruth, Hannah, Abigail, Michal, Bathsheba, Jezebel, Athaliah, Jehoshabeath, Belshazzar's mother, Elisabeth, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalen, Martha and Mary, Sapphira, Dorcas, Lois, Eunice—who that reads the Bible is not familiar with these names? Who can forget how they come up at almost every turn, and have a place and a portion in almost every story? To say, in the face of these names, that women have no influence and are of no importance, is simply absurd. Let them know that they have a mighty influence, and let them use it for good. What the oil is to the machinery, what the whetstone is to the scythe, what the fire is to the steam-engine, what the stream is to the water-wheel, all this the woman may be to the man. Let her remember it, and strive daily to do good.