

# The Minister's Wife of Olden Times

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**I**T IS not very long ago since the right of women to ownership of themselves was a debatable question. The small ambitions of young women were tranquilly squelched with the authoritative statement that "a girl was to live under her father's roof and be subject to him, and serve him till her marriage. Then she was to go to her husband's house and obey and serve him." This was a survival of "the contempt for physical weakness and women" of which Walter Bagehot speaks in his "Physics and Politics" as "characteristic of primitive society." It led men then to supply themselves with wives by capturing them, as if they were wild animals, or by purchasing them if any one else had claims on them.

Since a woman could not own herself, she could not own property, could not demand wages for her work and could not dispose of her time as her taste and capacity dictated. These arrangements were in the control of the person to whom she owed service and obedience. She only needed to be trained to her duty. Where the law was silent on this subject a public sentiment existed stronger than law, that compelled unmarried women to observe these unwritten commands. Concerning married women the law was not silent and is not today. There were homes where unmarried daughters lived through life, rendering unpaid service, from very love and devotion, and there are such today. And there were, as now, marriages based on mutual respect and affection, which made the earthly heaven of both parties, to whom the law was a dead letter. For humanity is diviner than law and men are not infrequently nobler than the laws they enact.

## Marriage and Remarriage.

Somewhere in the '50s a Connecticut clergyman wished to marry his sister-in-law. She had worked for her widowed father twenty-two years without wages, although he was able to pay her, had carried on the multifarious labors of a large farm with financial success and had reared younger brothers and sisters to useful and respectable maturity. Meantime her father had married again and she could be spared from her home. But the father, a miserly old curmudgeon, stoutly opposed the daughter's marriage and not only refused to give her a decent "setting out," as the country squire phrase it, but locked up her wardrobe and denied her that. All the same her clerical lover married her, and, being as renowned for grit as for grace, he then commenced suit against the irate father for the unpaid services of his daughter for twenty-two years.

He lost his case through some informality, but it provoked great discussion at the time, involving even the pulpit, which blazed with condemnation of unfilial children who forgot to "honor their father and mother." Some of his ministerial brethren handled the clergyman with great severity and hurled at his devoted head an avalanche of scripture texts to prove that "children can never do too much for their parents." This aphorism was in everybody's mouth in those days, as is its complement which today supplants it: "Parents can never do too much for their children." Both are true within certain just limitations.

## Woman's Work as It Was.

Colonel Higginson tells us of a scholastic committee in a Massachusetts town, the members of which said seriously in their report, speaking of an appointment: "As this place offers neither honor nor profit, we do not see why it should not be filled by a woman." Work of this description has been considered woman's work ever since the world began, and when her services have been so eminent as to compel a reward of money, or so illustrious as to win applause, both the money and glory have usually been diverted from their rightful owner to some man who had a "claim" upon her.

If a woman married a minister in those days she ran the risk of adding to her disabilities and discomforts. For she was con-

sidered one of the minister's "belongings," and when the parish committee made a contract with him it went without saying that her services were thrown into the bargain. The female contingent of the old-time parish regarded the minister's wife as their especial perquisite. She was to be appreciated as their needs or whims might suggest and as her temper and will would permit. It was not so very long for the minister's wife that her husband was her legal owner, since if she only knew enough—and what woman does not when she chooses?—she could transmute this doctrine of legal ownership into a legal fiction and bring him to be her most loving and devoted subject forever. But subordination to her husband's parish was a very different affair, for women are more conservative than men, less lenient to the shortcomings of their sex and the standard by which they measured the minister's wife was beyond attainment.

She must be a pattern of godliness, indoors and out, tempted in all points like other women, but always without sin. Her housekeeping must be a marvel of excellence, with a time and place for everything, and an ever readiness for the unexpected events, which are sure to happen. She was not to be thrown off her base by the intrusion of any number of her husband's "people" on washing day, when she could serve only a picked-up dinner, nor by the descent of the sisterhood into her parlor on Sunday noons between services to eat their lunches, eeked out by her freshly drawn tea and seed cakes. Her husband's white neckerchiefs and starched bosoms and cuffs must always be immaculate and her own apparel and that of her children must be spick, span and uncrumpled, as if it had just come out from the bureau drawer.

## Some Necessary Qualities.

Corneliness and grace must drape her like a garment and yet she would not be tolerated if her beauty fired the hearts of the male members of the parish. She must be a "chaste keeper at home" and yet a visitor not only among the poor, the sick and the afflicted, but in all the households of the people. She was the preordained president of all the missionary, maternal, charitable and sewing societies formed among the women and a leader in the Sunday school and "female prayer meeting." And to crown the whole she was expected to administer her husband's usually meagre salary so that it would cover all expenses, although it was partly paid in meal and potatoes for the family and hay and oats for the horse, with spareribs and roasts of beef at "killing time" and a "donation party" at the end of the year.

And yet the minister had no difficulty in supplying himself with a wife. Though the position was formidable, it was deemed a post of honor and the successful minister's wife was regarded as a remarkable woman, and very justly. If a clergyman unwisely

accepted a pastorate before marrying he was sure to be embarrassed by the number and variety of matrimonial candidates forced upon his attention, not to mention more serious happenings.

When I became the wife of a Universalist minister, over fifty years ago, the most lugubrious prophecies of disaster attended me, for I was then a member of a very conservative "evangelical" church. The apprehensions of my friends, which were never realized, sprang from their ignorance of the unlikeliness of orthodox and liberal parishes. Both Unitarians and Universalists were at that time in the thick of their mighty struggle for existence, with the whole orthodox church banded against them. The members of the two denominations were either "come-outers" from the older churches or recent converts to what their opponents regarded as fatal heresies and were ostracized by their former brethren.

## Demands of Church Work.

Enthusiastic in their defense of what they regarded as truth and confident of ultimate victory, the liberals were very tolerant within their own limits and were bound together in a friendship born of battle for the right. There was less organized work for women within their parishes and the minister's wife, as a rule, suffered little among them from exactions or criticism.

All this I learned from personal observation and experience and from the confidences of heavily burdened "parochial wives" in the older churches. Their grievances were not confined to private utterances alone, for suddenly, like a bolt from a clear sky, a little book, entitled "The Shady Side," made its sensational debut in church circles and was read by everybody. The author was evidently a woman of spirit, whose lot had been cast with an uncongenial parish, where she had been supervised and nagged beyond human endurance. It was followed immediately by "The Sunny Side," written by Mrs. Phelps, the mother of the distinguished author, Mrs. Elizabeth Stuart

Phelps. She wrote from a different standpoint. The wife of an eminent clergyman and the daughter of another who was a power in Andover Theological seminary, her lot was cast among refined and cultivated people, from whom she received love and helpfulness while the other one met only criticism and hindrance. Mrs. Phelps became the pet of her husband's parish, whereas the author of "The Shady Side" was made a "bone of contention."

Both books were widely read and much discussed publicly and privately. It began to dawn upon the community that ministers' wives were an oppressed class, whose grievances could only be redressed by giving them an amount of freedom and self-ownership. Hitherto denied them. This impression was deepened by an occurrence in central Illinois during the civil war. The wife of a Presbyterian clergyman, an intellectual, studious woman, the mother of six children, who was exemplary as wife, mother and housekeeper, came to disbelieve the creed of her husband's church, in which she had been educated and had hitherto accepted. This gave great offense to her husband, his denizens and the leading people of his parish. And carefully complying with the regular forms of law they pronounced her insane and placed her in the insane asylum at Jacksonville, Ill.

## Emancipation of Woman.

Since then Father Hyacinthe, the liberal French priest, who renounced his vow of celibacy and married an American woman, has argued in the New York Independent that "the husband is to direct the conscience of his wife precisely as the father directs that of his child." But nobody took up the nauntlet that the priest threw down. For the colleges had opened their doors to women by this time, who were studiously acquiring knowledge and ability for the personal direction of their own consciences. This they have found more satisfactory and

quite as safe as the method advocated by Father Hyacinthe. Milton taught the same doctrine in his famous line, "If, for God only, she for God in him!" but women unlearned that long ago.

The Old Testament scriptures contain the story of the conquest of the ancient city of Jericho by the Israelites. The priests marched round the city seven days, blowing trumpets, accompanied by this people. On the seventh day they all gave a great shout, when the walls of the city fell down and the people went in and took possession. I have heard soldiers of trumpets at shouts of the people at yet the thunder of the falling walls. But I see that the walls are down and that women have entered positions heretofore closed to them and are taking possession of privileges and rights long denied them and that man himself is the chief factor in their large emancipation.

## Today and Yesterday.

The minister's wife today is a free woman, and may become the "leading lady" of the parish, if she chooses. If she prefers to confine her activities to her family and her own pursuits the parish accepts the situation and contents itself with the exchange of courtesies common to polite society. If she adds beauty and power to her husband's work by her wise helpfulness she may be sure of appreciation and love. She will be criticized, of course, but who escapes criticism? If there is a blemish in her personal appearance, an infelicity in her style of dress, a faint of Bohemianism in her housekeeping, a suspicion of crankiness in her literary or religious views, or if she is not up to date in the changing etiquette of society, it will be detected and commented upon. But no Procrustean torture will be employed to bring her into conformity to an authorized model. For the model disappeared some time ago, with the beadle and the tithing-man.

Evidently the ministers' wives propose to set the pace for themselves in the future, for the press informs us that a magazine has been started in their interests. It is called "The Mistress of the Manse," and is said to "fill a long-felt want." Why not? The ministers have magazines devoted to their specialties, and why should not ministers' wives announce their opinions, wishes and needs?

## Why, Indeed

"The man who does a retail business is just a common tradesman," suggested the thoughtful youth.

"He is," replied the girl who thought she knew something of social standards and requirements.

"And the man who does a wholesale business is a merchant," continued the youth.

"Yes," admitted the girl.

"So really it is better to do a wholesale than a retail business," persisted the youth. "The man who deals in quantities ranks the higher."

"He does," answered the girl.

"Then, why is it," demanded the thoughtful youth, "that we are so dead set against polygamists?"

## Their Chances

Pittsburg Gazette: "I prithree, dost thou hear the news?" asked Mr. Hamlet Ham, the eminent tragedian, or Mr. Gad Zooks, the comedian.

"I didst not," was the latter's reply. "Reiterate the news to me."

"There's a corner in eggs."

"Really, truly?"

"Truly, really! The price is now 35 cents a dozen, with perpendicular tendency. I need not point out to you, my friend, the importance of this fact to our noble art."

"Thou needst not. Eggs are now too costly for missiles. We will rally forth." Then the one-night stands suffered an invasion.



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# Two Groups of Representative Railway Employees



BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT, BROTHERHOOD OF RAILWAY TRAINMEN, UNION PACIFIC SYSTEM—Photo by a Staff Artist.



BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT, RAILWAY CONDUCTORS, UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD—Photo by a Staff Artist.