

## AN HONORABLE WIFE AND MOTHER

"Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. of the poor and needy. 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. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

"She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor: yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry: her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

"She maketh fine linen, and selleth it: and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing: and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed: her husband also, and he praiseth her.

"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates," Proverbs 31:10-31.

**T**his description of a good, "house-mother-wife" attests the honorable posi-

tion of women in Israel. It would have been impossible in eastern countries, where she was regarded only as a plaything and a better sort of a slave. This picture which is painted for us here by God the Holy Spirit is about equally far removed from the old-world and from the modern ideas of a woman's place. "This virtuous woman" is neither a doll nor a graduate nor a public figure at all. HER KINGDOM IS HER HOUSE.

Her works "PRAISE HER IN THE GATES," but it is her husband and not she that "sits" there among the elders. It is not wedded love that is pictured here, and is neither the ideal woman nor wife that is pictured here, but the ideal head of a household, on whose management, as much as of her husband's work, its well-being depends.

There is plenty of room for modern ideals by the side of this old one, but they are very incomplete without it. If we take the "oracle" which his mother taught King Lemuel to include this picture, the artist is a woman, and her motive may be to sketch the sort of a wife her son should choose.

In any case, it is significant that the book which began with the magnificent picture of "Wisdom" as a fair woman, and hung beside it the ugly likeness of folly, should end with this charming portrait.

This is an acrostic, and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet being arranged in such a way, that it is also a literary structure showing the importance of this woman and her place in society. The A B C's of womanhood.

There are three verses forming a kind of prologue, which is the introduction and that is verses 10-13, then follows the picture proper, which is brought into unity if we suppose that it describes the growing material success of the diligent house-keeper, beginning with HER OWN WILLING WORK, and gradually extending till she and her family are well to do and among the magnates of her town.

Verses 13-29 then follow two verses of epilogue or conclusion. Verses 30 and 31 include the rendering "virtuous," which is unsatisfactory, for what is meant is not moral excellence, either in the wider sense or in the narrower to which, in reference to woman, that great word has been unfortunately narrowed. Our colloquialism, a woman of faculty, would fairly convey the idea, which is that of ability and general capacity.

We mentioned that there is no light of wedded love in the picture. That is true of the main body of it, but no deeper, terser expression of the inmost blessedness of happy marriage was ever spoken that in the quiet words, "the heart of her husband trusteth in her," with a repose of satisfaction, and with the tranquility of perfect assurance.

The bond uniting husband and wife in a true marriage is not unlike that uniting us with God. **Happy are they who by their trust in one another and the peaceful joys which it brings are led to united trust in a yet deeper love, mirrored to them in their own.**

It is true that the picture here is mainly that of confidence that the wife is no squanderer of husband's goods, but the sweet thought goes far beyond the immediate application. So with the other general feature in verse 12, "she will do him good and not evil, all the days of her life."

**A true wife is a fountain of good and good only, all the days of her life, and beyond them too,** when her remembrance shines like the calm west after a cloudless sunset. This being so, as it were the overture, next follows the main body of the piece.

It starts with a description of diligence in a comparatively humble sphere. Not that in verse 13 the woman is working alone. "She toils willingly," or as the literal rendering, "with the pleasure of her hands."

**THERE IS NO PROFIT IN UNWILLING WORK. Love makes toil delightful, and delightful toil is successful. Throughout the Word of God the Bible reverences diligence.** It is the condition of prosperity in ma-

terial and also in spiritual things. Vainly do men and women try to dodge the law which makes the "sweat of the brow" the indispensable requisite for "eating bread."

When commerce becomes speculation, which is the polite name for gambling, which, again, is a synonym for stealing, it may yield much more dainty fare than bread to some for a time, but is sure to bring want sooner or later in individuals and communities. **THE FOUNDATION OF THIS GOOD WOMAN'S FORTUNE WAS SHE WORKED WITH A WILL.** There is no other foundation, either for fortune or any other good, or for self-respect, or for progress in knowledge or goodness or spirituality.

Then her horizon widens, and she saw a way of increasing her store. "She is like the merchants ships, she bringeth her food from afar." She looks afield, and sees opportunities for profitable exchange. Promptly she avails herself of these, and is at work while it is yet dark. She has a household now, and does not neglect their comfort, any more than she does their employment. Their food and their tasks are both set them in the early morning, and their mistress is up as soon as they.

Her toil brings in wealth, and so verse 16 shows another step of her advance. "She considereth a field, and buyeth it," and she has made money enough to stock it with vines, and so add a new source of revenue, and acquire a new position as owning land.

**But prosperity does not make her relax her efforts** so we are told again in verses 17-19 of her abridging the hours of sleep, and toiling with wool and flax, which would be useless tautology if there were not some new circumstances to account for the repetition.

Encouraged by success, she "girdeth her loins with strength," and since she sees that "her merchandise is profitable," she is the more induced to labour. She still works with her own hands, verse 19, but the hands that are busy with distaff and spindle are also stretched out with alms in the open palm,

and are extended in readiness to help the needy.

A woman made unfelling by wealth is a monster. **Prosperity often leads men to -niggardliness in charitable gifts, but if it does the same for a woman, it is doubly cursed.** Compassion and charity have their home in woman's hearts. **If they are so busy holding the distaff and or the pen that they become hard and insensible to the cry of misery, they have lost their glory.**

Then following a series of verses describing how increased wealth brings good to her household and herself. The advantages are of a purely material sort. Her children are "clothed with scarlet," which was not only the name of the dye, but of the stuff. Evidently thick material only was dyed of that hue, and so was fit for winter clothing, even if the weather was so severe for Palestine, that snow fell. Her house was furnished with "carpets" or rather "cushions," or pillows, which are more important pieces of furniture where people recline on divans than where they sit on chairs.

Her own costume is that of a rich woman. "Purple and fine linen" are tokens of wealth, and she is a woman enough to like to wear them. **There is nothing unbecoming in assuming the style of living appropriate to one's position.** Her children and herself thus share in the advantages of her industry, and the husband, who does not appear to have much business of his own, gets his share in that he sits among the wealthy and honored inhabitants of the town, "in the gates," the chief place of meeting for business and gossip.

Verse 24 recurs to the subject of the woman's diligence. She has gotten into a "shipping business," making her the expert in trading with the merchants, literally, Canaanite, or Phoenicians, the good traders of the East, from whom, no doubt, she got the purple or her clothing in exchange for her manufacture. But she had a better dress than any woven in looms or bought with goods.

"Strength and dignity" clothe her. "She laugheth at the time to come," that is, she is able to look forward without dread of poverty, because she has realized a competent sum. Such looking forward may be like that of the rich man in the parable, a piece of presumption, but it may also be compatible with devout recognition of God's providence. As in verse 20, beneficence was coupled with diligence, so in verse 26 gentler qualities are blended with strength and dignity, and calm anticipation of the future.

A glimpse into the "very pulse of the woman's nature" is given. **A true woman's strength is always gentle, and her dignity attractive and gracious.** Prosperity has not turned her head. "Wisdom," the Heaven descended virgin, the deep music of whose call we heard sounding in the eighth chapter of Proverbs, dwells with this very practical woman.

"The virtuous woman" is the woman with wisdom. Notice the wisdom that is manifested in this woman is very practical. In other words, heavenly wisdom has a field for its display in the common duties of a busy life, does not dwell in hermitages, or cloisters, or studies, **but may guide and inspire a careful house-keeper to her task of wisely keeping her husband's goods together.** The old legend of the descending deity who took service as a goat-herd is true of the heavenly Wisdom, which will come and live in kitchens and in shops.

But the ideal woman has not only wisdom in act and word, but "the law of kindness is on her tongue." **Prosperity could not rob her of her gracious demeanor.** Her words should be glowing with the calm flame of love which stoops to lowly and undeserving objects. If wealth leads to presumptuous reckoning on the future, and because we have "much goods laid up for many years," we see another use of leisure than to eat and drink and be merry, we fatally mistake our happiness and our duty. **But if gentle compassion and helpfulness are on our lips and in our hearts and deeds, prosperity will be blessed.**

**Nor does this ideal woman relax in her diligence, though she has prospered.**

Verse 27 seems very needless repetition of what has been abundantly said already, unless we suppose, as before, new circumstances to account for the reintroduction of a former characteristic. These are, as it seems to me, the increased wealth of the heroine, which might have led her to relax her watchfulness. Some slacking off might have been expected, and excused, but at the end, as at the beginning, she looks after her household and is herself diligent. The picture refers only to the outward things, but we may remember that the same law applies to all, and that **any good, either of worldly wealth, or of intellectual, moral, or spiritual, is only preserved by the continuous exercise of the same energies which won it at first.**

Verses 28 and 29 give the eulogium pronounced by children and her husband. The former "rise up" as in reverence, the latter declares her superiority to all women, with the hyperbolic language natural to love. Happy the man who, after long years of wedded life, can repeat the estimate of his early love with the calm certitude born of experience.

The epilogue in verses 30 and 31 is not the continuation of the husband's speech. It at once points the lesson from the whole picture of King Lemuel, and unveils the root of the excellences described. **Beauty is skin deep. Let young men look deeper than a fair face. Let young women seek for that beauty which does not fade.**

"The fear of the Lord" lies at the bottom of all goodness that will last, through the tear and wear of wedded life, and of all domestic

diligence which is not mere sordid selfishness or slavish toil. THE NARROW ARENA OF DOMESTIC LIFE AFFORDS A FIT THEATRE FOR THE EXERCISE OF THE HIGHEST GIFTS AND GRACES, AND THE WOMAN WHO HAS MADE A HOME BRIGHT, AND HAS WON AND KEPT A HUSBAND'S LOVE AND CHILDREN'S REVERENCE, MAY LET WHO WILL GRASP AT THE MORE CONSPICUOUS PRIZES WHICH WOMEN ARE SO EAGER AFTER NOWADAYS.

She has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her. She shall receive the "fruits of her hands," both now and hereafter, if the "fear of the Lord" has been the root from which that fruit has grown, and "her works shall praise her in the gate," though she sits quietly at home. It is well when our deeds are the trumpeters of our fame, and when to tell them is to praise us.

The whole passage is the hallowing of domestic life, a directory of wives and mothers, **a beautiful ideal of how noble a thing a busy mother's life may be, an exhibition to young men of what they should seek, and of young women if they would cultivate the quality which would keep love in the home and to cultivate attractiveness which would lure men to their feet.**

Do you know a virtuous woman who is far above rubies? You can!

Buddy Dano, Pastor  
Anderson Bible Church  
Anderson, Indiana  
(765) 649-0523