

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA

"Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the Church that is in their house," Romans 16:3-5.

Here we have a wedded couple presented to us even in scanty notices and they bring out some interesting points which are important for us to learn in order to enhance our Christian way of life. We are told that Aquila was a Jew. We are not told whether Priscilla was a Jewess or not. So far as her name is concerned, she may have been, and very probably was a Roman, and, if so, we have in their case "a mixed marriage," such as was not uncommon then, and of which Timothy's parents give us another example.

She is sometimes called "Prisca," which was her proper name, and sometimes Priscilla, which was an affectionate diminutive. This couple had been living in Rome, and had been banished under the decree of the emperor, just as Jews have been banished from England and from every country in Europe again and again.

They came from Rome to Corinth, and were, perhaps, intending to go back to Aquila's native place, Pontus, when Paul met them in the latter city, and changed their whole lives. His association with them began in a purely commercial partnership. But as they abode together and worked at their trade, there would be many earnest talks about Christ, and these ended in both husband and wife becoming believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The bond thus knit was too close to be easily severed, and so, when Paul sailed across the Aegean for Ephesus, his two new friends kept with him, which they could be more the ready to do, as they had no settled home. They remained with him during his somewhat lengthened stay in the great asi-

atic city, for we find in the first epistle to the Corinthians, which was written from Ephesus about that time, that the apostle sends greetings from "Priscilla and Aquila and the Church which is in their house." But when Paul left Ephesus they seem to have stayed behind, and afterwards to have gone their own way.

About a year after the first epistle to the Corinthians was sent from Ephesus, the epistle to the Romans was written, and we find there the salutation to Priscilla and Aquila, which is our text now. So this wandering couple were back again in Rome by that time, and settled down there for awhile. They are then lost sight of for sometime, but probably they returned to Ephesus.

Once more we catch a glimpse of them in Paul's last letter, written some seven or eight years after that to the Romans. The apostle knows that death is near, and, at that supreme moment his heart goes out to these two faithful companions, and he sends them a parting token of his undying love.

There are only two messages to friends in the second epistle to Timothy, and one of these is to Priscilla and Aquila. At the mouth of the shadow of the valley of death he remembered the old days in Corinth, and, to us, the unknown instance of devotion which these two had shown, when, for his life, they laid down their own necks. That is all that the Bible tells us about Priscilla and Aquila. Now what can we learn from this lady, and these scattered notices of her? Let me tell you what this "*Woman in My Life*" taught me:

IN HERE WE HAVE AN OBJECT LESSON AS TO THE HALLOWING EFFECT OF CHRISTIANITY ON DOMESTIC LIFE AND LOVE. **Being in full-time Christian service at the point of salvation carries over into our every day life and relationships.**

Did you ever notice that in the majority of the places where these two are named, if we

adopt the better readings, Priscilla's name comes first? She seems to have been the better man of the two, and Aquila drops comparatively into the background. Now, such a couple, and **a couple in which the wife took the foremost place, was an absolute impossibility in heathenism.** They are a specimen of what Christianity did in the primitive age, all over the empire, and is doing to-day, everywhere, lifting woman to her proper biblical place.

It is interesting that in my own personal life I can see this principle as a reality in that my wife was the one who was instrumental in leading me to a saving knowledge in Jesus Christ and she was the leader, spiritually speaking, for many years. And then finally as I began to mature as a Christian, then the Lord decided to take her home to be with Him and that was the end of all her physical suffering.

But here Priscilla and Aquila are yoked together in "all exercise of noble end," and helping one another in Christian work, and bracketed together by the apostle, who puts the wife first, as "his fellow helper in Christ Jesus," stands before us as a living picture of what our sweet and sacred family life and earthly loves may be glorified into, if the light from heaven shine down upon them, and is thankfully received into them.

Such a house as the house of Prisca and Aquila is the product of Christianity, and such ought to be the house of every professing Christian. For we should all make our homes as "tabernacles of the righteous," in which the voice of joy and rejoicing is ever heard. Not only wedded love, but family love, and all earthly love, are then most precious, when into them there flows the ennobling, the calming, the transfiguring thought of Christ and His love to us.

Notice again even in these scanty notices and these references to this woman and her husband, there is twice this remarkable expression: "The Church that is in their house." Now, I suppose that that gives us a little glimpse into the rudimentary condition of public worship in the primitive Church. It was

centuries after the time of Priscilla and Aquila before circumstances permitted Christians to have buildings devoted exclusively to public worship. Up to a very much later period than that which is covered by the New Testament, they gathered together wherever was most convenient. And I suppose, that both in Rome and Ephesus, this husband and wife had some room, perhaps the workshop where they made their tents, spacious enough for some of the Christians of the city to meet together for Bible study.

We would like people who talk so much about "the First Church" and refuse the name to individual societies of Christians, and even to an aggregate of these, unless it has, "bishops," to explain how the little gathering of 20 or 30 in the workshop attached to Aquila's house, is called by the apostle without hesitation, "The Church which is in their house."

It was a part of the universal Church, but it was also a "church" complete in itself, though small in number. "Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there I am in their midst."

We have here not only a glimpse into the manner of public worship in early times, but we may learn something of far more consequence for us, and find here a suggestion of what our homes ought to be.

"The Church that is in their house." Fathers and mothers that are responsible for your homes and their spiritual atmosphere, ask yourselves if anyone would say that about your house, and if they could not, why not?

There is another lesson from this "*Woman in My Life,*" Priscilla, another OBJECT LESSON AS TO THE HALLOWING OF COMMON LIFE, TRADE, AND TRAVEL. It does not appear that, after their stay in Ephesus, Aquila and his wife were closely attached to Paul's person, and certainly they did not take any part as members of what we may call his evangelistic staff. They seem to have gone their own way, and as far as the scanty notices carry us, they did not meet

Paul again, after the time when they parted in Ephesus.

Their gypsy life was probably occasioned by Aquila going about, as was the custom in old days when there were not trade unions, or organized centers of a special industry, to look for work where he could find it. When he had made tents in Ephesus for awhile, he would go now somewhere else, and take temporary lodgings there. Thus he wandered about as a working man. Yet Paul calls him his "fellow worker in Christ Jesus," and he had, as we saw, "a church in his own house."

A roving life of that sort is not generally supposed to be conducive to depth of spiritual life. But their wandering course did not hurt these two. **They took their Christianity with them.** It did not depend on locality, as does that of a great many people who are very religious in the town where they live. And, when they go away for a holiday, they seem to leave their religion behind, along with their silver plates, at home.

But no matter whether they were in Corinth or Ephesus or Rome, Priscilla and Aquila took the Lord Jesus Christ with them, and while working at their camel's hair tents, they were serving God. **In full time Christian service at the point of salvation and did their job, tents, as unto the Lord.**

We don't need half as many preachers as we have, but we need more Christians as merchants, and travellers, and tradesmen, like Priscilla and Aquila.

IN PRISCILLA AND AQUILA WE CAN SEE THE UNEXPECTED ISSUES IN OUR LIVES. Think of that complicated chain of circumstances, one end of which was round Aquila and the other round the young Pharisee in Jerusalem. It steadily drew them together until they met in the lodging at Corinth. Claudius, in the fullness of absolute power said, "Turn all these wretched Jews out of my city. I will not have it polluted with them any more. Get rid of them."

So these two were uprooted, and drifted to Corinth. We do not know why they chose to go there. Perhaps they themselves did not

know why, **but God knew.** While they were coming from the west, Paul was coming from the east and north. He was "prevented by the Spirit from speaking in Asia," and driven across the sea against his intention to Neapolis, and hounded out of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea, and turned superciliously away from Athens, and so at last found himself in Corinth, face to face with the tentmaker from Rome and his wife. Then one of the two men said, "Let us join partnership together, and set up here as tentmakers for a time."

What come out of this unintended and apparently chance meeting? The first thing was the conversion of Aquila and his wife and the effects of that are being realized by them in Heaven at this moment, and will go on to all eternity.

So in the infinite complexity of events, do not let us worry ourselves by forecasting, but let us trust, and be sure that the Hand which is pushing us is pushing us to the right direction, and that He will bring us, by a right, though roundabout way, to the city of habitation.

It seems to me that we poor, blind creatures in this world, are somewhat like a man in prison, groping with his hand in the dark along the wall, and all unawares touching a spring which moves a stone, disclosing an aperture that lets in a breath of purer air, and opens the way to freedom. **So we go on stumbling in the dark, and presently, without our knowing what we do, by some trivial act we originate a train of events which influences our whole future.**

Again, when Aquila and Priscilla reached Ephesus, they formed another chance acquaintance in the person of a brilliant young Alexandrian, whose name was Apollos. They found that he had good intentions with the knowledge of the Gospel. So they took him in hand, just as Paul had taken them in hand. They did not know how large a fish they had caught. They had no idea what a mighty power for Christ was lying dormant in that young man from Alexandria, who knew so much less than they did. They instructed

Apollos, and Apollos became second only to Paul in the power of preaching the Gospel.

So the circle widens and widens. **God's GRACE flows from one man to another, spreading onward and outward.** And all Apollos converts, and their converts, and theirs again, right away down the ages, we may trace back to Priscilla and Aquila. So we can see in them the principle of Romans 8:28, "all things working together for good."

Do not let us be anxious about the further end of our deeds, their results, but be careful about the nearer end of them, "their motives," and God will look after the other end. Seeing that "thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that" or how much any of them will prosper, **let us grasp all opportunities to do His will and glorify His Name.**

Then in Priscilla we see an instance here of the heroic self-devotion which love to Jesus Christ kindles. "FOR MY SAKE THEY LAID DOWN THEIR OWN NECKS." We do not know to what Paul is referring, maybe to that tumult in Ephesus, where he certainly was in danger. But the language seems rather more emphatic than such danger would warrant. Probably at some perilous juncture of which we know nothing, for we knew very little, after all, of the details of the apostle's life, in which Priscilla and Aquila had said, "Take us and let him go. He can do a great deal more for God than we can do. We will put our heads on the block, if he still may live."

That magnanimous self-surrender was a wonderful token of the passionate admiration and love which the apostle inspired, but its deepest motive was love to the Lord and not to Paul only. **Faith in Christ, and love to Him ought to turn cowards into heroes, to destroy thoughts of self, and to make the utmost self-sacrifice natural, blessed, and easy.**

We are not called upon to exercise heroism like Priscilla, **but there is as much heroism needed for persistently Christian life, in our prosaic daily circumstances,** as has carried many a martyr to the block, and many a tremendous women to the pyre. We can all be heroes, and if the love of Christ is in us as it should be, we shall be ready to "yield ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our spiritual service."

Long years after, the apostle, on the further edge of life, looked back over it all, and, while much had become dim, and some trusted friends had dropped away, like Demas, he saw these two, and waved them his last greeting before he turned to the executioner.

"Salute Priscilla and Aquila." Paul's Lord is not less mindful of his friends' love, or less eloquent in the praise of their faithfulness, or less sure to reward them with the crown of glory.

"Whoso confesseth Me before men, him will I confess before the angels in Heaven."

Remember Priscilla. She is a fine lady. You can learn a lot from her. I have. I salute Priscilla also.