

ARTICLE II.

A PLEA FOR THE FAMILY.

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ONE cannot read the New Testament with any degree of thoughtfulness without being impressed with the different modes in which Christ treated the various perplexing problems of human life. Remarkable for his utterances, he was not less remarkable for the things which he did not say. Every day he saw the widow and the orphan, but he did not build a house of mercy or an asylum. He saw his nation rent in twain by hostile forces, and contented himself without an expression of his preference for a particular form of government. He saw the terrible traffic in human beings, called slavery, but no Garrisonian tirade against it ever fell from his lips. Palestine was seething with sedition, but he never suggested a Hague tribunal. The drunkard was found on the streets of the Holy Jerusalem, but he never asked him to sign a pledge; the courtesan was there, but he did not stop to found a house of prayer. His followers have done all of these things. With divine discretion, and wisdom unparalleled, he left a few great principles, by which men could remedy many of the world's wrongs. On many of the political, theological, and social institutions of his day, he manifested almost absolute silence, which has been a disappointment to the reformers, and has perplexed many of his disciples, ever since. The notable exception to this rule is Christ's attitude on the nature and obligation of the family.

The uniformity of the Synoptic Gospels in giving the utter-

ances of Jesus on this subject indicates how profound an impression they must have originally made upon the minds of the writers. On this particular subject the legislation which he prescribed was specific. When they tempted him, he explained with candor and thoroughness the Christian law of the family, and its relation to the old dispensation. He uses the analogy of the family to teach his theology. God is a Father: man is a child. His habitual sympathy for the life in the home, his presence at a wedding feast, his subjection to his parents, his attitude toward Martha, and the woman at the well of Samaria, his refuge in the home at Bethany, his last thought upon the cross for his mother,—all of these constitute a marked feature in the teaching of our Divine Lord.

To all of this there is a striking contrast in modern society, with its twofold theory of marriage. One conception of it, embracing a philosophy of bloodless individualism, holds that the only interests involved are those of the contracting parties; while the other conception recognizes the family as the unit of civilization, and a great factor in problems of social structure and social obligation. Dr. Peabody says: "Domestic instability tends in a most startling manner to become an epidemic of social disease. The number of divorces annually granted in the United States of America is, it appears, both at a rate unequalled in any other civilized country, and at a constantly accelerating rate." A learned essayist says of our legislation, that it "presents the largest and strangest, and perhaps the saddest, experience in the sphere of family laws which free, self-governing countries have ever tried." A book, published by Columbia University, on Economics and Public Law, asserts that Canada, Great Britain and Ireland, France, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Roumania, Russia, and Australia granted a total of

20,111 divorces, while in the same year the United States granted 23,472 divorces,—an excess over all other countries in the Christian world of 3,361. In a period of twenty years, when the increase of population was sixty per cent, the increase of divorces was one hundred and fifty-six per cent. In Connecticut there is annually one divorce to every ten marriages, in New Hampshire and Rhode Island one to every eleven, in San Francisco one to six, while Ohio increased her divorces from 2,270, in 1880, to 3,217, in 1890. A marriage is legal in many States without a scrap of writing or a witness. Better legal protection is given to the state and the individual in the transference of a piece of real estate than to the parties entering into the marriage contract. South Carolina is the only State in the Union which grants no divorce. New York is the only State in the Union which proposes to grant divorces only on scriptural grounds. The Illinois statutes, after reciting a long list of grounds upon which a divorce may be granted, conclude by empowering the Court to grant a divorce upon any plea which it thinks justifiable. Some Western States go a step further, and make a shameless bid to those who are dissatisfied, to come and live in their State, and have their marriage relation dissolved. The alarming unfruitfulness of the American family tells the story more plainly than words could. of the unpatriotic fathers and mothers, who are willing that the parentage of the country should be borne by those less fitted for the task. France is alarmed at her low birth-rate. Massachusetts has the same percentage, with other States closely following. At this rate, some one says, the future philosopher will have to change his proverb from the “survival of the fittest to the arrival of the unfittest.” The transgression of the fundamental laws of nature have only added to the burdens of the church and state. The retiring Modera-

tor of the last Presbyterian General Assembly said, "Our ideals of the home have gone down." The Archbishop of Canterbury has recently said: "It would be vain to ignore the warning voices which tell us on either side of the sea of a certain decadence in the definitely religious life of the home—a falling off, that is, in the very force which gave its distinctive inspiration and its distinctive power to so much of our grand-sire's life. If that be true,—and, in spite of all explanatory qualifications, nobody will, I think, say it is wholly false,—it surely behooves us to consider what we can do to safeguard the men and women, and above all the children, of America and England, from a peril whose gravity it is impossible to overestimate, because it affects the very foundation of our Christian life." In view of these common and well-known facts, and of the testimony of those whose position has enabled them to correctly analyze the statistics, and in view of the perils which beset the family and the ideals of Jesus, as Christian men and women, we are confronted by a social problem of extreme gravity. I cannot hope to say very much that is new upon a subject upon which so much is being constantly written, but if I can crystallize the ideas which the reader already has, my object will be attained, in this Plea for the Family.

The world needs a fresh conviction of the nature, the stability, and the obligations of the family. The general unsettlement of belief and institutions which have characterized the past decade or two has had its effect upon the theories of the family. At a rapid rate we have been removing all the hedges and boundary lines, and filling up the ditches that marked the limits of our life in days gone by. The positiveness of the Puritans has been supplanted by a cheap form of liberty, the result of which has been the loosening of our hold upon the family as a divine institution.

The exaltation of the individual as the unit of society is a heresy of modern life. The family is the unit of the social fabric. This was the teaching of Jesus when he said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." It meant the absolute fusing of two persons into one: "The twain are one flesh." This passage in Genesis is quoted by our Lord, and receives his unhesitating sanction. The family is as a foundation-stone in the building; and, if the stone begins to disintegrate, and fall asunder, the building cannot stand. As the oldest institution, it is the center from which the constructing forces of society are continually radiating. There are many indications that this was true in the social conditions in ancient Rome and Israel. "A cohesive family is the best germ for a campaigning nation," said Mr. Bagehot. And the history of centuries has confirmed the Christian church and modern research in the place it has assigned to the family, in the social fabric of ancient and modern life. Show me the nation where the family is the unit of society, and I will show you the nation where the evils and disasters which we deplore are prevented. Point out to me the families where the father is the king and minister, and the mother is enthroned in the midst of her children; where they speak of honor, love, and obedience, and where they are listened to and obeyed,—and I will show you the community where liberty is loved, where the principles of equality are believed in, and where the great sentiment of brotherhood is appreciated. . . . God saved Noah and his family as the beginning of a new creation, and ever since as the glory of Christianity. One says, "As the creator is more than the creature, the fountain more than the stream, the seed more than the plant; so the family is more than the church and more than the state. For these flow out of the

family; and when the church is scattered, when the state is dissolved, the family will remain—the unbroken bond of humanity, the enduring memorial of Eden.”

The recognition and explicit teaching of marriage as a God-ordered institution is a necessity to a saner and safer view of the subject. Before the Ten Commandments were cut in the stone, the divine element in marriage was the law of God. The importance of the rite will not be increased until we shall have touched it with eternity, taught men that it is more than a human convention, and more than a civil-social institution based upon a legal contract, with only three parties—man, woman and the state. As a biblical fact, it is pre-eminently a religious institution, based upon the social needs and instincts of human nature. The reasonableness of the divine statutes and enactments of marriage is found in the fact, that the sexes complement each other, as the two halves of a whole humanity. God’s method has been to “set the solitary in families.” In the Old Dispensation, religion went by households. In the New Dispensation, baptism often went by households. The eucharist was first a family feast. Instruction usually went by families, while God’s covenant with families has been fully justified by the career of the great and small men of history.

The recognition and teaching of marriage as a human institution is the introduction of a destructive force in the life of the church and state. It means the lowering of the marriage covenant to a material, if not an animal, basis. It paves the way for an easy dissolution of the marriage tie. As human law did not originate marriage, neither can it dissolve it. The perpetuity of the home and of the social order are threatened by the secularization of holy wedlock. There is a lax recognition and application of Christ’s teachings by mankind. The

ministry itself is carelessly negligent or woefully ignorant of its duty in this matter. The re-marriage of those who have transgressed every word of Christ's utterance has sometimes been accomplished by prominent ministers in the kingdom. A minister who winks at the outraging of divine law, and the dissolution of ties that were never intended to be broken, cannot be faithful to his ordination vows. Solemn prayers and formal benedictions are not fragrant enough to overcome the stench of vows which are blasphemous. The church and the minister who sanction and bless an unscriptural marriage are guilty of matrimonial blasphemy.

The theme is one that is often full of difficulty. Where there is a lack of affinity, love, kindness, and consideration, and the utter absence of forbearance and forgiveness, a marriage may become a daily crucifixion. Where, as it often happens, there is, on the part of the stronger one of the two, brutality, drunkenness, and irritableness, home may become a torture comparable to nothing in our experience. Is a woman bound to bear all of her life, cruelties resulting from her marriage to a man who afterwards becomes a brutal drunkard? Is a man bound to cling to a woman who turns out to be a virago? Is the one mistake of an unfortunate marriage to blast a whole lifetime?

Here the teaching of Jesus was clear, positive, and unequivocal. To put away one's wife or one's husband, and to marry another, he asserted, was adultery. In the two instances in which Matthew quotes the words of the Master, he has the clause "saving for the cause of fornication," while the accounts of Mark and Luke omit even this exception,—omit this exception, as I think Meyer rightly contends, because it was understood or regarded as a matter of course. To interpret the teaching of Jesus without this single clause would be to

rob it of much of its force. There is no divergence of statement on the question of re-marriage after such separation. Here the Synoptic Gospels agree, and here Christ was emphatic. Where marriage has become intolerable to either party, he did not forbid a legal separation. It gives to each party the opportunity to make the best of their mistake as if they had never married, with the exception of the privilege of re-marriage.

It is well said, "He teaches no prohibition of voluntary separation in cases of conjugal failure. He makes no cruel demand upon the innocent to sacrifice children, or love, or life, to one terrible mistake; but, except, at the utmost, for one cause,—and perhaps not even for that cause,—the mistake is one which, in the judgment of Jesus, involves a permanent burden. Marriage when undertaken must be regarded, not as a temporary agreement, but as a practically indissoluble union."

However much men may call his teaching overstrained morality, or harsh in view of the conditions of modern life, the history of nations makes the teaching reasonable. Nothing can be more clear than that it is the possibility of re-marriage that provokes a large proportion of the divorces which are disgracing our age and blasting our homes. It is the prolific father of vagrant fancies, attentions, and intimacies that so often have a destructive result. A writer in the *New York Outlook* has pointed out that there have recently been given thirty-seven causes for seeking a separation, and they are so silly that the wonder is that they should be for a moment seriously entertained. He quotes a case where a separation was allowed because the wife failed to sew buttons on her husband's vest; in another, because she would not rise early and call him in the morning; and to the wife, because the husband did not come home until ten o'clock at night, and kept his wife

awake, talking, sometimes until midnight, and in another case, because the husband never offered to take her out driving. Some States have the curse of what is called an "omnibus clause," which permits the court to grant a divorce for any cause deemed sufficient by it, and when it shall be satisfied that the parties can no longer live happily together. And our federal system, too, often allows the "omnibus clause" of one State to become the divorce law of another State.

The lesson ought to come home to Christian ministers with great emphasis, when we remember, that the teachings of the New Testament were born out of conditions very similar to those which confront us in this country to-day. A shameful dissolution of the domestic ties marked the era of Christ's life. Divorce was so common that it was granted for every trifle that had the semblance of an excuse. Ostentation and extravagance marked the day, and an attempt was being made to twist the divine record so as to license the very thing it was intended to forbid. With much the same conditions, with perhaps an added flippancy in the treatment of the whole subject of marriage, there is a special message to the ministry, calling for a comprehensive, philosophical, and biblical treatment of the subject of the family, as a factor in the process of social evolution; calling for an unequivocal sound on marriage as a *divine* institution, clothed with all the dignity and sanctity which our Lord himself lent to it,—a need for no uncertain sound on consecutive or contemporaneous polygamy. Indeed, the burning question of the hour is the recognition of the family as the divinely appointed center, where character is formed, out of which are the issues of life for the future of the state and country, and the necessity for a holy war against the insidious and fatal foes that threaten to lay waste what has always been man's fairest heritage.

Aside from the social aspect, there is a spiritual ideal connected with this subject. The atmosphere of religion in the home, which binds hearts together, shares the sorrows, doubles the joys, and creates an epidemic of unity and love, is, after all, the best constitution for the family. Much of our labor in guarding marriage by rules is like propping up a wall which has already begun to fall. The dangers which threaten the stability of the family are the product of unscriptural views of happiness and success. The church of to-morrow must emphasize religion in the home, if she is to redeem life from the spirit of ignoble selfishness and commercialism, which now threatens the perpetuity of the family.

We need sometimes to look backward to see how far we have traveled. Fifty years ago the family altar in Christian homes was general. Before many a boy to-day there comes the vision of how, at the end of a frugal yet hearty breakfast, the father rose from the table, and with simple reverence read to the quiet and respectful family a chapter from the Word of God. Then from the youngest child to the old grandfather they knelt, in devotion of heart expressed by the devotion of the body, and offered up a prayer of thanksgiving to him who watches over the sparrows, gave expression to their trust in him, and supplicated divine help, that, for that one day, they might live honest, kindly, and faithful lives.

In contrast with this picture is the opening of the day in many a well-conducted Christian home of the present. Too often an altar is not set up at the beginning. This is a ruinous sacrifice for the church and the home. On many family altars in Christian homes the fire has been permitted to grow dim and disappear. The father comes to breakfast with a jaded look on his face, that tells of heavy burdens, fierce competition, and sometimes an unnatural strain to keep up appear-

ances. The morning paper takes the place of the Bible, the children are hurried off to school. There is no priesthood of the parents, no opportunity for a common religious feeling, or aspiration. "The picture is no exaggeration, and the fact no fancy. We are losing our home life, and our home life is losing its religion." The intensity of the world's insistent pressure calls for a modification of some of our customs. But that modification ought not to eliminate family worship, either in the morning or the evening, in a Christian home. It is a magnificent witness for Jesus Christ when Daniels of modern times can maintain their devotions, and make them supreme to the persistent calls of time.

The privileges and obligations of the family ought to be held before no one more continuously and emphatically than before the father. Hopkinson Smith calls the father "that left wing of the family guard which generally manages to retreat during an engagement, leaving the command to the inferior officer." Modern life has witnessed the prerogatives and powers of the father one by one disappear, with a consequent loss of influence in the home. He once had the glory of being father, teacher, priest, and judge all in one. So long as education is not identical with schooling, so long as the parental relation is a moral and spiritual one, the specific duties of companionship, instruction, and guidance shall rest upon the parent until the child has found himself. The man who said, "Oh, I leave all the training of the children to their mother; she gives them her religion, and then, when they are old enough to vote, I shall give them my politics," committed a psychological blunder, and lost his opportunity. For it is neither right nor possible for a parent to *give*, or for a child to accept, religion, politics, or any thing of that nature, from his parents. In contrast to such an exception stands the ex-

ample of Coleridge. An English deist, calling upon him, bitterly complained against the rigidity of instruction in Christian homes. "Consider, said he, "the helplessness of such a child. How selfish is the parent who thus ruthlessly stamps his ideas and religious prejudices into the receptive nature, as a molder stamps the hot iron with his image. I shall prejudice my children neither for Christianity nor for Buddhism, but allow them to wait for their mature years, and then choose for themselves." A little later Coleridge, leading his æsthetic friend into the garden, suddenly exclaimed, "The time was in April when I killed the young weeds, and put my beds out to vegetables, flowers, and fruits, but I have now decided to permit the garden to go on until August or September, and then allow the beds to choose for themselves between weeds and fruit. I am unwilling to prejudice the soil either for thistles and cockle burrs or roses and violets."

It was said of Lyman Beecher, that he taught his boys theology as they caught perch and pickerel; literature as they gathered sweet flag, mythology as they cut up apples before a blazing fire to make the annual barrel of cider applesauce; as they piled up wood, he related tales from Walter Scott. A better home atmosphere will come not only when the father takes cognizance of God's covenant with parents and children and the critical hours of youth, but when he fills to the full his share of home duties, and when he is willing to make less money, to be less prominent in social and political circles, and to give of *himself*, that through training and example he may contribute his part to the making of home ideal.

Neither the church nor the state has manifested an adequate conception of the family in the social structure. We have not been awake to the forces which are undermining it,—the saloon, the clubs of every variety, apartment and boarding

houses, commercial traveling, the plea of poverty, and certain employments of women, which result in a distaste for domesticity, the labor of wives and mothers in factories, which compels them to change their home to a lodging-place, the socialistic theories of marriage,—all of which are striking at the foundations of the institution, and must be met by the civic, social, economic, and religious agencies which will give the family its adequate position. It sustains a vital relation to the great industrial problems of the country. It is a close ally to good government, public morality, and sound economics. It is closely connected with the crime and vice of the day. Out of 5,511 convicts at the Elmira Reformatory, thirty-eight per cent had parents known to be intemperate, and thirteen per cent more of doubtful habits; eighty-one per cent had parents not possessing property; forty-four per cent had parents of little or no education. Out of these same 5,511 convicts, fifty-four per cent came from bad homes, and thirty-eight per cent more came from homes only fair; not more than six per cent came from homes that were good; forty-two per cent were homeless when committed; ninety-seven per cent came from bad associates. Notwithstanding the overwhelming significance of the family to the church and state, there is but a feeble recognition of this important institution. A notable illustration of this is found in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which gives forty-seven pages to the subject of fortifications, and one hundred and one pages to hydromechanics, and less than ten pages to the subject of the family, and those ten pages wholly taken up with the origin of the family; while state constitutions and law-books and ethical discussions of today have a great deal to say of the problems of marriage and divorce, but very little to say of the family and its larger aspect.

In view of these facts, no more important problem confronts the workers for righteousness than how to preserve our homes and make them better. It is the one remaining institution of Paradise, the secret of all sociology, the beginning and the end of all reformations, and the unit of society, whose redemption means the redemption of the world. The home is the corner-stone of the Republic! It is the place of beginnings—life, love, work and obedience begin here. Fatherhood in the home makes it easier to understand the Fatherhood of God. Reverence for motherhood here means honor for womanhood everywhere. Obedience in the home means respect for law in the nation!

The minister of to-morrow who can shift the center of religious life from the church to the family, who can plead for economic changes so that every workingman may be able to own his own home in comfort and respectability, who exalts parenthood and the sacredness of marriage, and who labors for the uniformity of marriage and divorce laws in the United States, will go a long way toward solving the perplexing problems which confront American life. Let us realize that the future of the state, the welfare of the church, and the extension of the kingdom of God depend very largely upon the Christianizing of the family.