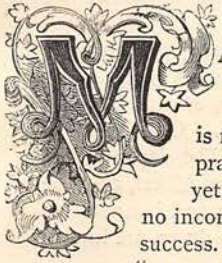


GREAT MEN'S WIVES.



MANKIND is always proud to acknowledge and honour a great man,—that is, when his claim to the title is fairly established; but who sings the praises of great men's wives? And yet very many of these have constituted no inconsiderable element in their husbands' success. It was a saying of Rousseau's that "a man is only what a woman makes him," and this sentiment is slightly varied in our own old English proverb, which says that "if a man would thrive he must ask his wife's leave." Certainly the majority of what are called self-made men—those who have amassed a fortune, that is—have owed that fortune quite as much to their wives' saving as to their own getting, and many of those who have succeeded otherwise than pecuniarily have found in their wives true helpmates. The records of history contain numberless examples of women who have done for their husbands what Aaron and Hur did for Moses, they have held up their hands and supported them at the greatest crises of their lives, and so turned what would have been a failure into triumph and success. And they contain examples, too, of those who have accomplished a far more difficult task—that of sustaining and cheering when endeavour and hope were dead. It is only necessary to mention the names of Gertrude von der Wart and Lady Rachel Russell in proof of this. True, these were extraordinary instances, but I maintain that they were only types, and that the never-ending story of woman's devotion and unselfishness is being repeated around us every day, to be read by all whose eyes are not held fast by selfishness or prejudice.

There is a good deal of talk, now-a-days, about woman's work and its limitations. Opponents, holding widely different views, express themselves sometimes wisely, sometimes injudiciously, but almost always warmly; and some women have earned for themselves an unenviable and dishonourable notoriety as anti-woman champions—working and writing against their own sex. This is neither the place nor the time to enter into the question itself, and either claim privileges for woman or refuse them to her. For all that, it may not be uninteresting to give a few instances of women in our own generation who have been to their husbands helpers and fellow-workers, as well as sympathising companions, and who have thus taken a position which is unanimously acknowledged to be a most proud and honourable one—that of a helpmate to man.

Amongst these the name that is first thought of, probably because it has so recently been brought before public notice, is that of Lady Augusta Stanley, the wife of the Dean of Westminster. Herself the daughter of a peer, and one of the most intimate of the Queen's personal friends, she possessed a largeness of heart and a strength of intellect which won respect and kindly feeling from all who came in con-

tact with her. She sympathised most heartily with her husband both in thought and work, while the poor of Westminster found in her tenderness and kindness a frequent alleviation of their miseries.

Every one will remember the testimony of John Stuart Mill to the worth of his wife, which is to be found in the dedication to her memory printed at the commencement of one of his essays: "To the beloved and deplored memory of her who was the inspirer and, in part, the author of all that is best in my writings—the friend and wife whose exalted sense of truth and right was my strongest incitement, and whose approbation was my chief reward—I dedicate this volume." It is said that such was Mr. Mill's sorrow at her death that he continued to reside at Avignon, the place where she was buried, that so he might continually visit her tomb and he never ceased to lament her loss.

Thomas Carlyle, one of the greatest intellectual lights of this century, has recorded his testimony to the worth of his wife on her tombstone: "In her bright existence she had more sorrows than are common, but also a soft amiability, a capacity for discernment, and a noble loyalty of heart which are rare. For forty years she was the true and loving helpmate of her husband, and by act and word unweariedly forwarded him, as none else could, in all of worthy that he did or attempted."

The wife of Sir William Hamilton, Professor of Logic in the University of Edinburgh, was a true helper to her husband; indeed it is more than probable that without her many of his best works would never have been written. When he was elected to the professorship, some of his opponents declared publicly that he would never be able to fulfil the duties of his position, as he was nothing but a dreamer. He and his wife heard of this, and determined to prove that it was not true. They therefore arranged to work together. Sir William wrote out roughly, each day, the lecture that was to be given the next morning; and as he wrote his wife copied it out; and again and again they sat up writing till far into the night. When Sir William was struck down with paralysis, the result of overwork, Lady Hamilton devoted herself entirely to him—wrote for him, read for him, and saved him in every way.

John Flaxman, the sculptor, had made considerable progress in his work when he married Anne Denman, a noble-spirited, intelligent woman, full of love for art, and with an intense admiration for him as an artist. It happened that soon after the event he met Sir Joshua Reynolds, in whose opinion no man could hope to become an artist who did not devote himself entirely to art, and who had not studied patiently and reverently the works of the great masters in Italy itself.

"Well, Flaxman," said Sir Joshua, "I hear you are married. You are ruined for an artist."

Flaxman went straight to his wife and said to her—"Anne, I am ruined for an artist."

"Who has ruined you, John?"

"It happened in church," he replied, "and Anne Denman has done it."

He then told her what Sir Joshua had said, and added, "I should like to have been a great artist."

"And so you shall be, and go to Rome too, if that will make you one."

"How?" said Flaxman.

"Work and economise," she replied. "I will never have it said that Anne Denman ruined John Flaxman for an artist."

And so the brave couple did work and economise. They worked patiently and hopefully for five years, never asked help from any one, never mentioned their intentions to any one, and at last went together to Rome, where Flaxman studied and worked to such purpose that he achieved both fame and competency. His success was not shared to the full, however, by his faithful wife, for she died many years before him.

The wife of the late Dr. Buckland considerably assisted her husband in his labours. She used to write from his dictation for hours at a time. She herself furnished many of the drawings with which his works are illustrated, and she skilfully and dexterously mended many of the fossils which but for her would have been useless.

The wife of Faraday was a true helper to her husband. After twenty-eight years of married life, he speaks in his diary of his marriage as an event which more than any other had contributed to his earthly happiness and healthy state of mind, and says, "The union has in nowise changed, except only in the depth and strength of its character."

Thomas Hood, the wit and poet, speaks thus of his wife—"I never was anything, dearest, till I knew you, and I have been a better, happier, and more prosperous man ever since. Whatever may befall me, the wife of my bosom will have the acknowledgment of her tenderness, worth, and excellence from my pen."

Speaking of Hood makes us think of two notable instances of great writers of our time who have not been happy in their wives—namely, Charles Dickens and Bulwer Lytton. It is neither a pleasant nor a thankful task to expose the spots which spoil the beauty of great works of art, nor to call attention to the littlenesses which detract from the admiration we feel for great men; nevertheless, there seems ample reason for believing that in both these instances whatever fault there was did not lie wholly with the wives. Thackeray, who has been frequently spoken of as a similar instance, was most loving and beloved by

his home-circle, but sustained a deep affliction in his wife losing her reason after the birth of one of her children.

The constancy with which so many women have cherished the memory of their husbands, when death has removed them from their sides, cannot but call forth both respect and admiration. Our Queen is herself a notable example of this. The depth of her sorrow for the loss of the good Prince Albert, and the faithfulness with which she cherishes and honours his memory, and teaches her children to do so, are known to all.

Lady Franklin, too, holds a foremost place among the faithful and true. When her husband, Sir John Franklin, did not return at the expected time from his last expedition to the Northern Seas, apprehensions began to be seriously entertained respecting his fate, and that of his brave companions. Lady Franklin offered rewards of two and three thousand pounds to any persons discovering or affording relief to the missing party, or making any extraordinary efforts with this object. She appealed to the American people to assist in the search, and she herself determined upon, organised, and to a great extent defrayed the expense of two expeditions to seek for traces of the missing party. For years she refused to give up hope, and it was only when Captain McClintock returned with what were considered full proofs of his death, that she rested in her endeavours to prosecute the search. To quote the words of Sir Roderick Murchison, "Nothing daunted by failure after failure, she persevered through years of hope deferred, with a singleness of purpose and a sincere devotion which were truly unparalleled." The little ship *Pandora*, which is now acting as the medium of communication between England and the present Arctic explorers, was fitted out in great part at her expense before her death.

These are a few instances out of many which might have been given of wives who have been to their husbands "true mates in soul and work, as well as in heart." It is the fashion now-a-days to give all the glory of success to the prominent actor in it, but the future will show that much "of worthy" that men have achieved has been, to say the least, "forwarded" by the women who have held up their hands.

It is the province of this paper to deal only with "great men's wives." An equally interesting subject of inquiry, and one perhaps less debateable, would be "great men's mothers." Many great men have had weak wives, but not many have become great who had not strong mothers.

PHILLIS BROWNE.

