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## THE PURITAN TEACHING ON MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

To-day, low standards of morality are accepted, tolerated, and even praised. Vice is not called by its right names. Sin is not regarded with shame, because it is no longer regarded in the sight of God. Custom and the course of the world govern the attitude of most people to marriage, whether they are married or not. Some marriages are free from gross sin; but in all classes of society, most children are brought up as pagans, ignorant of God, and His purposes for marriage and the family.

These words are a summary of the preface to the first "Puritan" book on this subject: Henry Bullinger's *The Christian State of Matrimony*.<sup>1</sup> We might justify our present study on exactly the same grounds.

### I

The Puritan's teaching on marriage and the family was very thorough, and thoroughly Scriptural. It was also exceedingly frank: they censure the "immodest modesty" which has so much affected Christians of later ages. In a practical way, they pierced deeply into the problems of marriage, and brought the light of Scripture to bear upon them. They claimed the Bible as their only authority; but their margins have many references to the classics, and Baxter quotes Lord Bacon's *Essays*. Where the Fathers or the Reformers supported them, they were always glad to quote their views, often at great length.

But the Bible was always their basis. They went to Genesis for their doctrine of the ordinance of marriage; they went to the Epistles (and especially Paul's) for its full meaning and for detailed instructions. Leviticus gave them their standards of hygiene. Proverbs was for them a mine of teaching on the subject. The Song of Songs, Esther and Ruth were not only allegorized, but used for practical teaching. Texts that may sound strange to modern ears in this connection were freely used.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Bullinger, *The Christian State of Matrimony* (1541), translated by Myles Coverdale.

The first step towards clearing marriage of calumnies, and showing its excellencies, was to state its institution. Marriage was an ordinance of creation. It was

instituted/namely in the paradise and garden of pleasure: yea and it was ordained/even in the beginning of the world/before the fall of man in al prosperite.<sup>1</sup>

God Himself—no man or angel—said: “It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him an help meet for him.” It was He who brought the woman to the man and blessed marriage, saying: “Increase and multiply.” The ordinance was meant to be between one man and one woman: “they twain shall be one flesh.” The Old Testament examples of polygamy are therefore corruptions of God’s ordinance; from the beginning it was not so. What God ordained for the first man, he ordained for all men.

Lessons were drawn from the account in Genesis. There is the familiar one that woman was not taken from man’s head (because the husband is the head), nor from the feet (that he should spurn her); but from his flesh and bone (that he might love her), and from his side, that she might be his helpmeet. Similarly, Adam’s sleep was meant to teach us to sleep to temptations in choosing a wife.

The definitions of marriage vary little from book to book. Bullinger’s is representative:

Wedloke is the yoking together of one man and one woman/whom god hath coupled together according to his worde/with the consent of thē both from thenceforth to dwell together and to spend their life in the equall partakyng of all such things as god sendeth/to the intende that they may bring forth childrē in the feare of him/that they may avoid whordom/and that (according to gods good pleasure) the one may helpe and comferte the tother.<sup>2</sup>

This definition includes the *three ends* of marriage, as traditionally stated. Firstly, procreation and bringing up children; secondly, avoidance of sin and uncleanness; thirdly, mutual help and comfort. Thomas Becon puts the third reason first, as “the avoidance of solitariness”; this order is used by other teachers also. William Perkins gives a fourth reason, which stresses that Christian marriage is to bring forth a holy seed. Though none knew better the need for free grace, the Puritans did not despise the “natural” means of adding to the membership of the Church.

<sup>1</sup> Bullinger, *op. cit.*, leaf 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bullinger, *op. cit.*, leaf 3.

A commentary on the excellencies of matrimony accompanies their doctrinal statements. It is the result of the counsel of the Triune God: "Let us make man" is but the beginning of the work to which the instituting of marriage belongs. It was God's first ordinance, and is honoured by heathen and Christian alike. Proofs of its excellencies are found everywhere. Genesis is little more than a record of births, marriages and children. The patriarchs and saints of the Old Testament were nearly all married, and so were many of the apostles and the great teachers of the Church. Our Lord Himself, virginally conceived as He was, was born within the state of holy wedlock, and honoured it by performing His first miracle at Cana.

They therefore exhort their hearers to enter the estate of matrimony. No one does this better than Becon:

Wherefore if the sense of nature, if honesty, if naturall affection, if devotion, if gentleness, if vertue anythyng move you: why abhorre you from that, whiche God ordaineth, nature enacteth, reason enticeth, the scriptures both of God and man praise, the Lawes commande, the whole consent of nations approve, to which the example of every good man provoketh ?<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to picture married felicity (and it must have been drawn from life) in a way that discounts "the hoary myth of Puritan asceticism".

Warnings are given, based no less on the word of God. Unhappiness in marriage there may be; but if so, that is due to defects in those who use it, not to the ordinance itself. Grace and perseverance lessen the troubles of marriage, which can never compare with its benefits. William Whateley (known as "the Roaring Boy of Banbury") called the second book he published *Care-cloth: a Treatise of the Cumbers and Troubles of Marriage*. In it he shows no patience with those who are not prepared for troubles:

"Such shall have trouble in the flesh." Didst thou never reade this scripture? or never marke it? or never believe it? If thou readdest it not, it was thy profanenesse; if thou markedst it not, it was thine heedlesnesse; if thou didst not believe it, it was thine infidelitie: every way it was thy folly, not to know before, what God had told thee before, that marriage would bee more full of afflictions, then single life.<sup>2</sup>

Puritan teaching on the single life, clerical celibacy, and virginity was well defined. Perkins, in his short and valuable

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Becon, *The Booke of Matrimonye* (1564); *Worckes*, Fol. DCXLIX.

<sup>2</sup> William Whateley, *Care-cloth: A Treatise of the Cumbers and Troubles of Marriage* (1624), p. 75.

work *Christian Oeconomie*,<sup>1</sup> states that a single life would not be necessary but for the Fall. Since the Fall, it is better for some men. It frees them from household cares, disposes them to heavenly things without distraction, and makes them more secure when danger threatens. Gouge points out that St. Paul's use of the words "good" and "better" in this connection is only concerned with certain men at special times. His arguments in the seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians may all be gathered under the heads of "present necessity" and "expediency".<sup>2</sup>

The qualification essential in one who would live single is to have the gift of chastity and continency. This is rarely given, and may be withheld even after much prayer and fasting for it. To all who have not the gift of chastity, marriage is commanded in God's name. Men and women must not use the troubles of married life, as poor excuses. "Better to have trouble with no sin, than to sin with no trouble".

Puritan views on clerical celibacy are stated in attacks upon Roman Church practice. With a wealth of historical detail, it is shown that enforced celibacy is a late invention. They argue that what our Lord and his apostles taught about the ability to live single being a gift, applies to all men, spiritual and temporal. They point out that the Roman position on this question illustrates their low view of marriage in general. Richard Baxter<sup>3</sup> is an exception to the Puritan type of teaching when he urges (in his *Christian Directory*) that ministers should, if they could, live single. If a vow of chastity had been taken, and the person were to find later that he had not been given the gift of chastity, he might break the vow without sinning, and get married.

Similarly, virginity was agreed to be a most excellent state for those called to remain in it. It is not superior to matrimony. Why detract from matrimony to praise virginity? Becon is content to leave to others the praise of chastity (which they say fills heaven): he will commend matrimony, for it replenishes heaven and earth.

<sup>1</sup> William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie* (1609), translated from the Latin by Thomas Pickering.

<sup>2</sup> William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (1634), p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Christian Directory* (Section II, Christian Economics).

## II

When the Puritan pastors had exhorted their people to marry, they went on to show them how to marry aright. Such advice was often introduced by a discussion of the various possible criteria for choosing a partner: riches of the mind, riches of the body and riches of temporal substance.

The last named is the least important kind: wealth is but luggage. It may be gratefully accepted if the person is also rich in virtue. It must not be overvalued.

Beauty, comeliness, health and a convenient age make up riches of the body. They must be treated with care: favour is deceitful and beauty is vain. The occasion when "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose", was the classic example of this fatal mistake of choosing for beauty alone. True fairness lies in the mind.

How then may the decision be made? The practice of asking for a sign, as Gideon did, is condemned. Thomas Gataker<sup>1</sup> knew a man who belonged to this type (which is not extinct). He would test a woman on whom he had cast his roving eye and affection, by asking her, in sermon time, where the minister's text was. If she not only told him the text, but offered him her Bible, she was the woman who was to be his wife.

But riches of the mind, which consist in those virtues which make for godliness, yield more reliable guidance. Matthew Griffith lists the relevant topics for us in his book: *Bethel: or a forme for families*.<sup>2</sup> They may be summarized thus:

1. The *report*. What do honest men think of them? Do the wicked also speak them fair? The voice of the people is commonly the echo to the voice of God.

2. The *looks*. "Godliness is in the face of a man"; but remember, fair faces may hide filthy minds.

3. The *talk*: and, sometimes more important than their conversation, their *silence*. Maids, especially, must speak like an echo.

4. The *apparel*. Clothes are a sure index of the way people think. (Griffith's biblical illustrations are hardly happy: not all gluttons wear purple every day, and not every saint wears haircloth!)

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Gataker, *A Mariage Praier* (1624), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Griffith, *Bethel: or a forme for families* (1633), pp. 255 ff.

5. The *company*. Robert Cleaver says: "Men are commonly conditioned even like them that they keep company withal. Choose such a companion for thy life as hath chosen company like thee before."

6. The *education*. What matters here is whether a person was brought up virtuously or viciously. But still more important is their reaction to their upbringing—did they follow the ways of those with whom they lived? Judas was one of the twelve.

These are the signs which must be sought. If you fail to do so, neither the strength of Samson nor the wisdom of Solomon will prevent your being overcome. No people are so often deceived as lovers, and three or four meetings are not enough. They need "to see one another eating and walking, working and playing, talking and laughing and chiding too; or else it may be, the one shall have with the other lesse than he or she looked for, or more than they wished for."<sup>1</sup>

As far as possible, partners should be of equal age, social position and wealth. The key word in all things is "fitness". Marriage with an unbeliever is completely excluded. A man must not contemplate marriage until he has the means to support a wife.

These principles indicate how a careful and intelligent decision may be made. But God alone can provide a marriage. He must work the will to it in both parties. Gataker is emphatic: "No marriages are consummate on earth that were not first concluded and made up in heaven, and none are blessed here, that were not in mercie made there".<sup>2</sup> Therefore above all things, *pray*. Do you want to marry a child of God? Then ask the Father first, in prayer.

Apparently, "romance" is ruled out. "Fond affections" must not be followed. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the Puritans did not recognize the category of "falling in love": they did, and accepted it.

Gouge utters a very necessary warning when he condemns

the dotage of Stoicks who would have all natural affection rooted out of man . . . what do they aime at, but to root that out of man, which God hath planted in him, and to take away the meanes which God hath used for the better preservation of man? . . . Not only the best and wisest men that ever were in the world, but also Christ

<sup>1</sup> John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Household Government* (1598), p. G.6.

<sup>2</sup> Gataker, *A Good Wife God's Gift* (1624), p. 10.

himselfe had those passions and affections in him, which they account unbeseeing a wise man. Their dotage hath long since been hissed out of the schooles of the Philosophers; should it then finde a place in Christs Church?<sup>1</sup>

Gataker recognizes that when all else is well, the two people are sometimes unable to fasten their affections, those secret links that no reason can be rendered of. "As Faith, so Love cannot be constrained. As there is no affection more forcible; so there is none freer from force and compulsion. The very offer of enforcement turneth it oft to hatred."<sup>2</sup>

Bullinger, in his teaching on what *consent* in marriage means, shows with care that it is not based on erotic love alone, which in its turn is based on transitory, physical things, does not last, and has nothing necessarily to do with God's ordinance. But neither is consent what he calls "natural inclination", where two people wish to marry merely because they are Christians, have a great deal in common, and expect the rest to follow. True consent in marriage is

that overgeving and graunt of thy heart when unto thy chosen spouse thou promisest and gevest thyself over in the highest love and fellowship that may be under god. . . . It springs out of gods ordinance and leaneth unto honesty; . . . and of god himself is the same will planted and mightily conceived in man. Matrimonial consent is the same heart disposition and love that Adam bore towards his Eve.<sup>3</sup>

Daniel Rogers, in his book *Matrimonial Honour*, gives a clear picture of what we might call falling in love.

So we see marriage love is oftime a secret worke of God, pitching the heart of one party upon another for no known cause; and therefore where this strong lodestone attracts each to the other, no further questions needs to be made but such a man and such a woman's match were made in heaven, and God hath brought them together.<sup>4</sup>

Rogers goes on to say that this "pitching" of the hearts does not always happen. But he stresses with the others that no true marriage is made without a linking of affections between the parties.

It might then be said that, as there are three main ends to marriage, so in the Puritan scheme there are three things requisite before marriage is contracted. First, a fitness and

<sup>1</sup> Gouge, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Gataker, *A Good Wife God's Gift*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Bullinger, *op. cit.*, leaf 20.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Rogers, *Matrimonial Honour* (1642), p. 148.



equality of character and personality; second, true affection each for the other; third, the assurance that the work is of God and has His blessing.

Next, we must consider the Puritan teaching on the marriage contract, or "spousals".

A contract [says Robert Cleaver] is a voluntary promise of marriage between one man and one woman, both being meet and free to marry one another, and allowed so to do by their parents.<sup>1</sup>

It was similar to the engagement of to-day. But it was a public act, made solemnly and usually followed by a psalm and prayer. Private contracts were valid and very popular, but they were condemned as the source of endless mischief.

The proper age for marriage is discussed in some books. Gouge approves the legal standard, fourteen for boys and twelve for girls. Bullinger says that we should not be less wise than the heathen, and quotes nineteen to twenty for men and seventeen for women. The Puritans seem, in general, to have approved of early marriage. The parents' consent was necessary always. If, however, parents by unjust refusal forfeited their claim to authority, they might be disobeyed: e.g., when marriage was arranged for money or social position (as was common), the children might obey God rather than men.

The time interval between betrothal and marriage was important. It prevented rashness, and gave time both for suitable domestic preparations and for the couple to get to know each other. It had to be at least three weeks. Long engagements were not approved; as soon as the contract was made, the wedding should not be long delayed.

The marriage service itself was regarded as a solemnization of the contract. There is very little controversy in Puritan books and sermons on this subject. I could find only one mention of the ring, and that by way of illustration. Gouge alone discusses the Roman sacrament of matrimony, and devotes to it no more than two pages out of seven hundred.<sup>2</sup>

The Puritan concern was to see that God was honoured in His ordinance, and decency and order established. In the service it was declared openly that God knits the marriage; promises were openly made and warnings faithfully to keep them given. Married listeners were by it reminded of their own vows, and called to repent.

<sup>1</sup> Dod and Cleaver, *op. cit.*, p. H.

<sup>2</sup> Gouge, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-7.

Though marriage was a spiritual and divine ordinance, the contract was regarded as only civil. The Puritans did not wish for the jealously guarded Roman authority to make and annul marriages. They gave little time or energy to legal reform: they aimed at a moral and spiritual reform, which was to them much more important.

In the average wedding of the day, riot and drunkenness, gluttony and shameless dancing were the order of the day. But the Puritans did not run to the opposite extreme. Mirth with honesty was a grace, a gift from God: none should forbid it. Feasts should be used with temperance and thankfulness. There is a time to laugh, a time to dance and a time to embrace. Only excess and abuse were denounced.

There was some confusion in the Puritan views on *divorce*. But all agreed that it might be granted for adultery. The Roman practice of allowing separation from bed and board only, was unjust: the guiltless party should be allowed to remarry after divorce.

Divorce is the remedy for marriage when adultery mars it, but it is like having a limb amputated, and the operation comes very near to the life itself. Puritan pastors were more concerned with preventing it from ever being required. Thus there are long sections in their books, on adultery and whoredom, in which the Biblical teaching is presented, and the people are exhorted to flee these sins. Some writers want magistrates to have power to prevent rash marriages, and to punish adultery. Mutual love might mend many quarrels if it were exercised. The magistrate should always attempt a reconciliation before granting a divorce.

Some believed divorce was permissible for desertion. Whateley was persuaded to abandon this view. But Perkins maintained it, and added "malicious dealing" and "long absence" to the list of legitimate causes. By the former is meant the position when "they require of each other intolerable conditions".

### III

Some Puritan preachers complained that they were given only an hour to speak at the wedding ceremony (or at the contract). But their sermons show that they compressed a great deal of instruction on married life into this short time. In their books it is expanded in great detail. Only an outline may be given here.

The *first years* of married life are the most important. The preachers plead the need for adjustment and mutual understanding. The couple should by no means be separated—Deut. xxiv. 5 is their authority here. These years are dangerous, for they are not used to each other and are certain to discover differences. If there is contention now, their discord will recur, and, like an old wound, break out at the change of weather.

Above all things, prayer must be exercised. But time must be allowed: "in space cometh grace." The grapes may be sour now, but if given time they will yield sweet wine.

Agreeing with a later Puritan, Whateley says:

as the young Bees do seek unto themselves another Hive so let the young couple another house, . . . that whatsoever come, they may never fall into that unhappiest of all unhappinesses, of either being tormentors of their Parents or tormented by them.<sup>1</sup>

They are taught not to borrow but to start with their own small portion, and to trust God. There should be a common purse, common counsel and no secrets. Grievances should not be harboured, but told discreetly.

She should not be merry when he is sad; he must not cast her faults into her teeth. No cause for suspicion should be given; neither should it be taken from an innocent action. Jealousy must be avoided; it is a "great noysome plague in wedlok". By words, manners and gestures they must show that they hold to each other alone.

This is the tenor of Puritan advice to married couples. There is little in it to offend the modern ear; it anticipates much of what is best in the so-called modern understanding of marriage. But we do not have to go far to find less congenial doctrine.

The headings in the section of Gouge's book (*Of Domesticall Duties*) which deals with the wife's duties begin thus:

1. Wife's inferiority and subjection to husband, mildness, obeisance, modesty in apparel, meekness of speech, etc. (17 topics)

There are four more headings and forty-one topics in which Gouge deals with the wife's subjection to the husband in all things.

When these sermons were first delivered, the reaction of Gouge's parishioners differed little from those of more recent

<sup>1</sup> Whateley, *Care-cloth*, Preface, p. x.

times. He was called a hater of women. But he complained in his preface to the published sermons that his teaching had been misapplied, and that the cautions and limitations he had attached to each duty had gone unheeded.

What was the Puritan doctrine of woman? When Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* (Book IV) was he giving vent to his own bitter feelings?

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemd;  
For contemplation hee and valour formd,  
For softness shee, and sweet attractive Grace,  
Hee for God only, shee for God in him.

Is this an expression of male egoism, as unpleasant as it is unscriptural? Milton learnt his doctrine from the men whose teaching we are considering. Is their doctrine the road to serfdom for women? Or is it an exposition of the Biblical teaching?

The Puritan arguments are, summarily, these: Firstly, from the law of creation: man was made first, then woman; moreover woman was made from man, for his use and benefit as a meet helper. Secondly, from the Fall: the woman was first in the transgression, and God Himself said that her desire should be towards her husband and that he should rule over her. The preachers found these doctrines confirmed and expanded in the Epistles, where they also found their third argument: man the head of the woman, as Christ is head of the Church. Possibly the line

Hee for God only, shee for God in him

was based on 1 Cor. xi. 3.

There was a fourth argument, based on the words "doth not nature itself teach you?" There is a difference in the natural order, which Christians do well to observe.

If their premisses about Scripture are accepted, their case is a strong one. Their view may be thought to be one peculiar to St. Paul, and not binding on Christians. If this position is taken up, more is at stake than a peculiar Puritan doctrine.

When William Gouge published his encyclopaedic work, he used cross-references to enable the wife to turn quickly to the husband's duty corresponding to her own, and *vice versa*. This was not just a useful device. It shows that he emphasized the mutuality of the relationship between the two. It was only in *authority* that they differed essentially. Gouge admits that the

actual difference is so slight that it is very easy to slip into the error of thinking that they are equal. They are heirs together of the grace of life. But there is a difference, which God has placed there. The Puritans could not have accepted Karl Barth's idea that the man and woman *together* form the image of God: "forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (1 Cor. xi. 7).

The instruction to the husband must be taken with that to the wife, or an unbalanced picture will be given. To be the head is as difficult as to be subject. To perform his duty as head, the husband is instructed to keep and use his authority. Keeping it means living well in general, and particularly, shunning bitterness, unthriftiness and lightness. Under lightness, the use of terms like "sweet", "chicke" and even contractions of Christian names, is banned. He must never beat his wife (a custom allowed and prevalent in those days). Whateley alone allows wife-beating, and that only when parents and magistrates have failed to cure the wife's maliciousness. As Henry Smith's margin has it: "A husband must hold his hand, and the wife her tung."<sup>1</sup> He must use his authority justly, wisely and mildly.

These things are his duties by virtue of his authority. But his chief duty is to love his wife—to love her as his own body, as he loves himself, and as Christ loved the Church. He is to honour her as his yokefellow and deputy, and to give her all she needs. Most writers allow her a measure of home rule: care of the maid-servants and daughters is her task.

The Puritans took seriously the teaching that man and wife are one flesh. With all its symbolical meaning, it referred first to a physical relationship. In popular thought, Puritanism is frequently equated with prudishness in this aspect of marriage. Emil Brunner regards pietistic Puritanical legalism as the first stage in the decline of the Biblical-Reformed idea of marriage. By making the idea of love (*eros*) indifferent, they are said to have given rise to prudishness.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of Puritan writings hardly bears this out. Just as, in the choice of a mate, love was not a thing indifferent; so in the married state they gave it due—though not undue—emphasis.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591).

<sup>2</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (trans.), 1937, p. 650.

Phrases like that of St. Paul—"render due benevolence"—were explained to their people. The preachers spoke frankly, for they believed that one way of sanctifying this ordinance by the Word and prayer was to assure them of its lawfulness, and of God's blessing upon it. Thus the scrupulous conscience might be freed from the burdens it so often bore.

The notion that marriage and its works are sinful is implicit in some of the Roman attitudes. A number of the Fathers of the Church teach that it is venially sinful. An illustration of this was the commanding of abstinence during Lent, and on Rogation and Ember days. The idea is still common, and is a fundamentally unbiblical one, as the Puritans laboured to show. Much space is taken up in condemning and disproving the doctrine. "Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled." Abstinence is allowed for some special season of prayer, or a public duty; it is of course commanded for the periods which Leviticus specifies. But generally, it must be by consent, and only for a season.

Let us again listen to sober William Gouge: he condemns

the disposition of such husbands as have no heat, or heart of affection in them: but Stoick-like delight no more in their wives than in any other women, nor account them dearer than others. A disposition no way warranted by the Word. The faithful saints of God . . . as also many other like to them, were no Stoicks, without all affection: nor did they think it a matter unbeseeming them, after a peculiar manner to delight in their wives (witness Isaaks sporting with his wife:) for this is a privilege which appertaineth to the estate of marriage.<sup>1</sup>

They refuse to give a list of rules to make everything easy.

We must take great heed [says Whateley] of laying snares upon men's consciences in matters of this nature: and must be very careful not to bind them, where God Himself has not bound them.<sup>2</sup>

Rogers discusses the principles involved. Our greatest sins are often in things lawful; and we are bound to show of what stuff we are made, by our conduct in this matter. Two extremes are to be avoided—defrauding one another and running to excess. Within these extremes much freedom may be enjoyed: this is necessary because of differences in age, temperament and

<sup>1</sup> Gouge, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

<sup>2</sup> William Whateley, *Bride-Bush* (1619), p. 18.

physical make-up. They may know that due measure is being observed when

snaring concupiscence is prevented, fitness of body and mind purchased, freely to walk with God and to discharge our duties without distraction or annoyance.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV

Puritan family life is usually pictured as a nightmare of austerity. But we must find room in our picture for the sort of picture Becon paints.

Now sir, how highlye will ye esteme this thing, when your fair wife shal make you a father to a fair childe: when some little yong babe shall play in your haul, which shal resemble you and your wife: which with a milde lisping, or amiable stammering shal call you Dad.<sup>2</sup>

The Puritans knew the joys of family life as well as its responsibilities.

They had a high view of the family, and crusaded for it. While they discuss the importance of the family as the basic unit in society, what concerns them is that it should be governed by the Word of God. Many ways of governing there may be, but only two aims are recognized. First, God's glory and Christian holiness are to be promoted. Secondly, the family must be sustained, as God provides, in the things of this life. Care must be taken, to these ends.

For want of this care [say John Dod and Robert Cleaver] many parents leave their children faire faces and foul minds; proper bodies and deformed souls, full coffers and empty hearts . . . where holinesse is not sought for in families there God hath no friends, nor lovers, nor walkers with Him, however they will sometimes come to visit Him in the Church.<sup>3</sup>

Family religion is of the first importance. It was the husband's responsibility to see that it was practised. It involves a common attendance on the means of grace, and sanctifying the Lord's Day. Family worship should take place morning and evening, and prayer be made before and after meals. Private instruction must be given; this meant catechizing, Scripture reading and preparation for the Word and Sacraments; it also meant thorough examination after each sermon, to see how much was

<sup>1</sup> Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Becon, *op. cit.*, fol. DCL.

<sup>3</sup> Dod and Cleaver, *op. cit.*, p. B.

retained. Correction was a part of family government: it should not be administered in anger, but in love to the one who has offended, and for God's glory. Only a real fault should be corrected, and then patiently and wisely. If necessary, corporal punishment might be used, suitable to the child's age and his offence.

The preachers stressed that love is the fountain of all parents' duties. But children should not be spoilt; parents must not, like apes, kill their young ones with hugging. The example of parents is the greatest stimulus to holiness, especially that of the mother, whose influence during the child's early years is greater.

It is perhaps too much to expect them to help our day in its preoccupation with the question of family limitation. It was so much more usual, if not much easier, for them to have their quivers full. But the words of Samuel Hieron are not irrelevant when he discovers

. . . the wretchedness of their thoughts who doe grudge and murmur against the encrease of children as a burthen; some would prescribe the Lord how many He should give them, and set him a stint which he must not exceed. A notable evidence of a miserable and faithlesse mind. For, whence is this feare . . . but from a distrustful opinion of inability to maintaine them?<sup>1</sup>

The Puritans gave a great deal of practical, commonsense advice, ranging from the nursing of babies to what should be done when children reach a marriageable age. Education should begin as early as possible, and though it should be thorough, godliness is more important than learning, and schoolmasters must be chosen with this in mind. The aptness or gifts of children should be noted, that they might be trained to a suitable calling. The claims of the Christian ministry should be remembered, and where the ability exists, a son should be exhorted to enter it.

Baptism was important, for it admitted the child to the Church and its privileges. He should be trained up in the way he should go, so that when he was old he would not depart from it. The child's first instruction in religion should be adapted to its age, so that the child receives it with delight. Thus the seeds of godliness would be planted early. The Puritan attitude to children thus differed from that of some moderns, who expect a child's conversion to be a dramatic experience.

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Hieron, *The Marriage Blessing*. Works (1635), p. 408.



Family life was a severe discipline. Recreation in moderation was allowed; and it is typical of Puritan devotion to proof-texts that this allowance is supported out of Zechariah viii. 5. Light books were forbidden, and the *Bokes of Robin Hode* were specifically banned. Though sons and daughters were to be kept from wanton and dishonest company, they were not to be shut up in a cage, but "to come forth sometimes to see good fashions and honest behaviours".

For all its severity, the picture of the Christian family as here presented it has a beauty all its own. It is natural to ask what the teachers were like at home. Did these giants of the faith have feet of clay, and did they soil the beauty of their teaching? We can examine their lives in their autobiographies and diaries. We may use the Everyman Edition of Baxter's *Autobiography*, as an introduction to their mode of life. We may there see the erstwhile exception coming in later life to prove the rule about the happiness and help of married life. Baxter's *Breviate of the Life of Margaret Baxter* is not as informative as it might be, because he suppressed important sections on the inducements which had led them to marriage. There are, also, the diaries of Richard Rogers, John Ward and others. Later *Lives of the Puritans* are not always helpful, being sometimes concerned more with their views on Baptism or their sufferings under the Act of Uniformity. But Samuel Clark's many *Lives* usually give some information about their marriages and homes. As far as may be judged, they adorned the doctrine that we have been considering. For all their "plain living and high thinking" they were lovely and pleasant in their lives.

To these men godliness was to be shown in the daily round and the common task, more than anywhere else. Holiness was not to be sought by withdrawing from daily duties, whether to a spurious asceticism or in search of esoteric experiences. "Pure religion breathing household laws" was with them not a poet's vision, but a practical programme and, in many cases, a realized ideal.

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