

From *A Good Wife God's Gift, and A Wife Indeed: Two Marriage Sermons* by Thomas Gataker, B. of D. and Pastor of Rotherluth. London, 1623

“A virtuous Woman is a Crowne to her Husband: But she that shameth him is as rottenness in his Bones.” (Prov. 12:4)

Husband and Wife are nearer than Friends, and Brethren; or than Parents and Children. [...] “Therefore,” saith the Holy Ghost, “shall a man leave father and mother, and be glued until, or cleave fast to his wife: and They two will be one flesh.”

The nearer the bond then, the greater the evil, where it falleth out otherwise than it ought. “A foolish Son,” saith Solomon, “is the calamity of his father.” And how is he his calamity? He is *filius pudevaciens*, such an one as shameth his Parents, and maketh them glad to hide their heads in the house. But an evil wife is as the rain dropping in through the tiles, that maketh him weary of the house, that vexeth him so that it driveth him out of doors.

Yea, as dropping in a rainy day, when it is foul without and it droppeth within. So that it maketh a man at his wits end, uncertain whether it be better for him to be abroad in the rain, or to bide within doors in the dropping. And for this cause, Augustine compareth “an evil Conscience to a bad wife” (and it may seem that he pleased himself somewhat in the similitude, he maketh use so oft of it) which when a man hath many troubles and afflictions from without, and would look home, hoping for some comfort from within, is much more troublesome to him than any of those his outward crosses are; is as a rock or shelf to the Sea-men in a storme, where they hoped to have found harbor and shelter against it.

Yea further, not as a dropping only that driveth a man from his house and home, and that when it raineth; but as a continual dropping in such a day. So that a bad wife is worse than a quartane ague, wherein a man hath two good days for one evil. He that hath an evil wife, is as one that hath an evil soul, a guilty conscience, that evermore sticketh by him, that everywhere accompanieth him, is a continual evil companion with him at bed and board, such as he cannot shift off or shun. And no marvel therefore if it be deemed the greatest temporal evil, because the most continual, and the most inward, for a man to be matched with an evil wife, or a women with an evil husband. For what is said of the one, is as true of the other, the relation between them being alike.

To draw all to a head then. An unkind Neighbor is a cross, but an unfaithful Friend is a great cross; an unnatural Brother a greater; an ungracious Child a greater; but a wicked, unquiet, or disloyal wife is the greatest of all, and if we believe Solomon, goeth beyond them all. In regard whereof he also elsewhere pronounceth that “it is better to abide on a corner of the housetop without, than to continue with such a one in a wide house;” yea that “it is better to live in the wilderness with the wilde beasts, than with such.”

But to leave this that is without my Text, and yet next door to it, (so neer here do good and bad neighbor together) and to come nearer home: Some it may be hearing Solomon speak on this manner might say, as our Savior's Disciples sometimes said, “If the case so stand between man and wife, it is good then not to marry.”

Now to such Solomon seemeth to answer in the words of my Text, that “It is not evil to marry, but it is good to be wary: that it is not the abuse or badness of some, that ought to make God's ordinance the less valued, or the less esteemed, being in itself and of itself a matter of great benefit. That as the inconvenience is great and grievous that a bad wife bringeth with her; so the benefit on the other side is no less that cometh by a good wife, by a wise and discreet woman” who is therefore here commended as a special Gift, as a principal blessing of God, such as goeth beyond any other temporal blessing whatsoever. And surely as there is no greater temporal cross or curse than the one, so is there no greater temporal blessing than the other.

## Roles of Women in Middle Ages and Renaissance

Jean Gerson (1363-1429), *Oeuvres complètes*. Translation (c) Jeay and Garay. Gerson was a theologian and Chancellor of the University of Paris.

### Section 1

The sacrament of marriage.

This sacrament requires and ordains that the husband loves his wife as he does his own body, and the wife also loves her husband, because they are but one flesh; they must be but one heart and one will in every good; it is God's pleasure when they agree to do Good. They must enjoy one another, be loyal, and not believe anything said against the other. The wife must gently obey her husband in what is reasonable, and the husband must honestly direct his wife according to his status, without pride, and keep peace and concord. If God gives them children, they must teach them their the faith and punish them if they curse or swear

The husband must look after important outside tasks without involving his wife. The wife must manage the household with sobriety, fairness, and frugality, without bothering her husband. A wife who spends too much is a great shame.

### Section 2

The wife must be subject to her husband before people and guests, and a loved spouse in bed. This means that she should not be treated as a servant or a chambermaid, but fairly. She should demonstrate her love to her husband, as she wants to be treated, showing gentleness to him in front of other people. Quietness, humility, sobriety, chastity, are the qualities which will make her please her husband. And also each one should like the other's friends, welcoming them pleasantly, and without suspicion.

If a spouse asks the other spouse to behave dishonestly, should the partner obey? No, even under the threat of death. One can secretly complain to a priest or to friends, then to a judge if there is no other remedy.

Marie de Gournay (1565-1645)

### Section 3

From *The Equality of Men and Women* (1622)

Suppose we believed that the Scriptures indeed order woman to submit to the authority of man because she cannot think as well as he can, see here the absurdity that would follow: women would be worthy of having been made in the likeness of the Creator, worthy of taking part in the holy Eucharist, of sharing the mysteries of the Redemption, Paradise, worthy of the vision, even possession, of God, but not of the status and privileges of men. Wouldn't we be saying then that men are more precious and sacred than all these things, and wouldn't that be the most grievous blasphemy?

### Section 4

from *The Equality of Men and Women* (1622)

Further, the human animal, taken rightly, is neither man nor woman, the sexes having been made double, not so as to constitute a difference in species, but for the sake of propagation alone. The unique form and distinction of that animal consists only in its rational soul. . . Man and woman are so thoroughly one that if man is more than woman, woman is more than man. Man was created man and female—so says scripture, not reckoning the two except as one, and Jesus Christ is called Son of Man, although he is that only of woman—the whole and consummate perfection of the proof of this unity of the two sexes. I speak thus according to the great Saint Basil. . . the virtue of man and of woman are the same thing, since God bestowed on them the same creation and the same honor: masculum et feminam fecit eos (from Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them”). Now in those whose nature is one and the same, it must be concluded that their actions are so as well, and that the esteem and recompense belonging to these are equal, where the works are equal. There, then, is the declaration of that powerful champion and venerable witness of the Church.

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*Basilikon Doron* —Greek for "royal gift"— was written in 1599 by James VI of Scotland, soon to become James I of England, in the form of advice for his son on kingship. *Basilikon doron. Or His Maiesties instructions to his dearest sonne, Henry the prince*

Treat her as your own flesh, command her as her Lord, cherish her as your helper, rule her as your pupil, and please her in all things reasonable; but teach her not to be curious in things that belong to her not. Ye are the head, she is your body: It is your Office to command, and hers to obey; but yet with such a sweet harmony, as she should be as ready to obey, as ye to command; as willing to follow, as ye to go before; your love being wholly knit unto her, and all her affections lovingly bent to follow your will.

And to conclude, keep especially three rules with your Wife: first, suffer her never to meddle with the politic government of the common-weal, but hold her at the Economic rule of the house; and yet all to be subject to your direction; keep carefully good and chaste company about her, for women are the frailest sex; and be never both angry at once, but when ye see her in passion, ye should with reason dampen yours. For both when ye are settled, ye are meetest to judge of her errors, and when she is come to herself, she may be best made to apprehend her offence, and reverence your rebuke.