

“Women as Preachers and Lecturers,” by J. A. Mowatt

Cited here by James White, editor of the *Review and Herald*.

Review and Herald, July 30, 1861, pp. 65-66.

[Extracted from the "Portadown News," Ireland, of March 2, 1861.]

[We consider the following a triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters to take part in the public worship of God. The writer applies the prophecy of Joel—“Your daughters shall prophesy,” &c., to female preaching; but while it must embrace public speaking of some kind, this we think is but half of its meaning. We have nothing to say upon what the writer claims to have been done by certain females. That to which the attention of the reader is especially called is the argument by which he shows that they have a right to do this, or any amount besides in the same direction.—u. s.]

To the Editor of the "Portadown News"—

DEAR SIR, A correspondent in your paper takes up the question of women occupying positions as public speakers, and by every means in his power endeavors to show that women ought not to do so; still, as he is "open to conviction," and as he wishes for "an explanation" of the texts which he quoted, I shall endeavor to gratify him therein.

I will say here that if a woman can effect good in a world like ours, where so much is yet to be done for its reformation, I would think twice before I would discourage her or throw any obstacle in her way. Perhaps no man living has effected half as much for a revival of religion as Mrs. Phoebe Palmer; but "An Admirer of Woman in her proper place," would not suffer a woman to teach. I would like to know if ever he saw a female engaged in a school to teach. Could such a man not see that the teaching of which Paul writes is not such as that given in our Sunday Schools, and from our pulpits or platforms? I hold that each individual in this world is morally bound to do as much good to others as he or she can; and he or she is bound to leave the world better than he or she found it—if they possibly can. And is Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe and other ladies to teach me through my eyes, and are they prohibited from teaching me through my ears? Certainly not. Has Miss Buck, of England, powers in the pulpit equal to the greatest pulpit orator of the day, and is she not to use such powers? Are Spurgeon and such men to be lauded to the skies while sowing the heresy of Calvinism, mixed up with scraps of street songs and old wives' fables, and is Miss Buck to be condemned while she preaches, with much superior eloquence and dignity, the glorious gospel of the grace of God to sinful, fallen mankind—none excepted? Let us hear no more of this condemnation of woman going about doing good. I suppose, indeed I might venture to assert, that Mrs. Palmer, Miss Buck, and women like them, have each done more to lead sinners to a Saviour than any man of the same period; and will not the souls thus saved be to these women "a crown of rejoicing?" To be sure they will.

Who would object to a woman rescuing his friend from temporal death? No man. Then why object to a woman rescuing men from eternal death? Who would dare say that Grace Darling did

wrong to go out in the life-boat and rescue the crew of a sinking vessel? No man. Why then object to a woman pushing out the gospel life-boat to rescue men sinking into perdition? Who would dare say Mrs. Fry did wrong in seeking to rescue men from dismal dungeons? No man. Then why object to woman going to seek and to save those that are pining in the dungeons of sin and iniquity?

Is not Mrs. Theobald one of the ablest advocates of the Total Abstinence cause? Is she surpassed by any as a speaker on that question? I venture to affirm she is not. Then why silence such an advocate?

Neither Paul nor any other apostle forbade women preaching, or lecturing. I affirm such a command is nowhere in the Bible, and I shall proceed to prove it; and, besides, I will prove that Paul taught the very opposite.

"An Admirer of Woman in her proper place" has quoted 1 Cor. 14:34, 35. Now, surely the fourteenth chapter does not contradict the eleventh, which was necessarily written before it. In 1 Cor. 11:4, 5 St. Paul says, "Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered dishonoreth his head; but every woman that prayest or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head." Why did not "An Admirer" read this chapter before he read the other?

Instead of St. Paul's forbidding woman to conduct public worship—for that is what praying and prophesying mean—he actually condescends, as "An Admirer" would perhaps think, to settle and arrange how a woman is to dress when she prophesieth, or preacheth. It will be seen from the verses I have quoted above, that whatever every man was to do in the church in praying and prophesying, woman was to do the same; and, instead of Paul forbidding the woman, he merely tells herself and the man how they are to dress—one with the head uncovered, the other with it covered. "An Admirer" has made some reference to Eve, but he is evidently totally ignorant of the nature of the temptation to which Eve was exposed, of the manner in which it was put, and of the share which Adam had in the matter.

Dr. Adam Clarke says the prediction of Joel 2:28, would not be fulfilled unless women prophesied, preached or taught; and he says Peter understood it thus when, in Acts 2:17, he, quotes it, saying, "Your daughters shall prophesy." Dr. Adam Clarke, in a word, is entirely in favor of female preaching, and contends that the verses quoted by "An Admirer" bear no such meaning as that attached to them by those who oppose female preaching.

Perhaps some may ask, "What is prophesying?" In 1 Cor. 14:3, St. Paul says it is to speak "unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort," and women were to do it. And, according to the word of the Lord by the prophet Joel, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" and, according to Peter, this prediction was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost; and according to Paul, women were to pray and prophesy as much as men, only to keep their heads covered. And why even this rule about the covered head? Simply because in the East then, and at present, an uncovered female was, and is, looked upon "all one as if she were shaven"—the latter being the

mark of prostitution. The reader will now see why St. Paul ordered the covered heads—that is, covered with a veil in the East—and this portion of his directions does not apply at all to our fashions.

Will the reader be kind enough to turn now to 1 Cor. 14, from which "An Admirer" quotes, and read the entire chapter over. You will see that St. Paul is writing on a different topic from that on which he wrote in chap. 11; and every fair interpreter of the Scripture will admit that, if in chap. 11 Paul authorizes female preaching, then he cannot in chap. 14, forbid it. Let us now see what chap. 14, refers to. There seems to have been some confusion in the church at Corinth, in their meetings of church courts; for it could not be in the ordinary or regular public service. The men speaking [verse 27] were to speak "by two, or at most by three, and that by course," or in other words, in their turn—after one another. This was to prevent two, or three, or half a dozen men speaking at once—or even a dozen, as I have often seen in public meetings. This was a meeting for discussion and debate on church matters, such as that recorded in Acts 15, where there was much disputing. It was not a regular religious service, and could not be such. At verse 29 it is said, "Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the others judge." Here, again, it was not an ordinary regular service; it was a meeting for discussion, and for the election of church officers; and the candidates for positions in the church were to be heard, and all the other members were to judge of the qualifications of each, and to make their selections accordingly. At verse 33, this view is sustained still further by the words, "For God is not the author of confusion." In order to prevent much discussion in these church courts, he forbids the women to speak in them—they are to ask their husbands at home; therefore Miss McKinney cannot be included.

Having thus clearly established that the place in which a woman was to keep silence was in a court of the church, not in an ordinary regular meeting, I shall pass on to notice the passage from Timothy.

In 1 Tim. 2:12, 14, St. Paul is forbidding the woman to usurp authority; and if any reader will but read this chapter, of fifteen verses, through, he or she will see at a glance that he has nothing whatever to say to public speaking. If "An Admirer" had quoted 1 Tim. 2:9, it might have been more needed in the present day. Our Methodist ladies seem to have forgotten that such a passage is in the Bible, "That women adorn themselves in modest apparel (could Paul have had hoops on a windy day in his prophetic vision?), with shamefacedness and sobriety: not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works." There is not a word in the entire chapter against woman speaking and doing good—adorning herself with good works—in the cause of God and of fallen and debased humanity. If, "An Admirer" will have a literal rendering of verse 12, then out with all our thousands of female Sunday-school and day-school teachers, for if a woman is not to teach, in the literal sense, then all our female teachers, religious and secular, in Sunday-schools, national schools, Church Education Society schools, &c., are all rushing on in direct opposition to Paul when he says, "I suffer not a woman to teach." The woman is to learn in silence with all subjection. Subjection to whom? Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Col. 3:18. This is the subjection spoken of in Timothy, as is clearly shown by Adam and Eve—husband and wife

—representatives of all our race of husbands and wives—being brought in by way of illustrating his subject, and the object which he had in view. A woman is not to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, that is, a wife is not to act so toward her husband. The passage has nothing whatever to do with regard to Total Abstinence lecturers, or gospel preachers. On the contrary, a woman is to pray and prophesy [1 Cor. 11:5] just as the man, and with equal power and authority; and this is according to the prediction of the Holy Ghost. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17.

"An Admirer" could not have quoted a case which tells more against himself than that of Phoebe mentioned in Rom. 16:1. She was a deaconess. Does not "An Admirer" know that the Church of England and other churches hold that a deacon was a certain rank in the ministry? And if so, then so was a deaconess. Dr. Adam Clarke says, too, that the deaconesses "were ordained to their office by the imposition of the hands of the bishop.' In the second verse of this chapter, Paul actually directs the Christians at Rome—the men, too—I wish "An Admirer" had been among them, how it would have lowered his dignity—to assist sister Phoebe "in whatever business she hath need of you." Does this not look very like an appointment of Phoebe as the first pope of Rome, for she was to have absolute authority over all the church there? I will conclude by glancing at female characters in Scripture who occupied a position as teachers and leaders of the people equal to men. Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth—mark, she was married, too—was a prophetess, and judged Israel. Judges 4:4, 10. Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum—a married woman also—dwelt at Jerusalem, in the Colledge; and her dignified message to the king, who came to inquire at her mouth the will of God, does not betray any trembling diffidence or abject servility, although "An Admirer" would have woman so much inferior to man. It would be, perhaps, useless to remind him that in Christianity there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:28. It is said [Micah 4:4], "For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron and Miriam." God here classes Miriam with Moses and Aaron, and declares that he sent her before his people. I presume had "An Admirer" been there he would have refused to go up through the wilderness under such a female leader. Need I refer to Anna, the prophetess [Luke 2:37, 38], and to the women which labored with Paul in the gospel as his fellow-laborers—therefore, preaching as he did [1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:2, 3, 6, 7, 12]? Timothy, in 1 Thess. 3:2, is styled a minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ.

Then these were the same as Timothy, who was a bishop in the church. In Rom. 16:12, three women are named as having labored much in the Lord; and Dr. Adam Clarke contends that they preached, for he says they prophesied, and that if a woman thus prophesied, then women preached. This is Dr. Clarke's view, and I value it as highly as John Wesley's.

"An Admirer" seems to think that woman is much inferior to man, and throws out taunts about mother Eve, to which taunts I have already alluded. If, through Eve, sin first entered into this world—and that too, with the hearty concurrence of Adam—then let it not be forgotten that by woman, without the concurrence of man, a Saviour came to bring deliverance. If woman be taunted about Eve, she can turn and point to Mary, and all the women who ministered to Christ daily up to his burial, and at his resurrection. Dr. Doddridge exhorts man to rejoice that, as by

woman came transgression, so by her came redemption to; and I may add—why should not women preach that redemption also?

Judging by the results which have followed the labors of such women as Mrs. Rogers, Mrs. Fletcher, Miss Tooth, Miss Culter, Miss Buck, Miss Marsh, Mrs. Theobald, Mrs. Stowe, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Booth, and a host of others, I rather think the Lord of the vineyard will require some more satisfactory excuse for even female timidity and backwardness in his service than the one given by "An Admirer," before they will be justified in ceasing to labor in his cause. I may say that I think Miss McKinney chose an admirable hymn. I am yours, &c. — J. A. MOWATT.