

WHY SHOULDN'T A GIRL FLIRT?

BY SARAH CANTWELL SMITH

WHEN the goodly King Arthur—the mythical hero of England—founded his Round Table of men chosen from all his realm, men so strong and brave and pure minded that they were to serve as models for the mighty world, who should ride abroad redressing human wrongs, he made them take this oath, among others: "To have one maiden only, cleave to her and worship her by years of noble deeds until he win her." And it was prophesied of the King himself, that "could he find

A woman in her womanhood as great As he was in his manhood, then The twain together well might change the world."

And it is the greatest tragedy in all literature that it was the Queen—the very one who was honored above all women of the land, that was to bring disgrace upon the kingdom and destruction to the King. Not that she meant to do this wrong, but it was May-time and the world was young and she wanted life and warmth and color, which she found in Lancelot, while the King, she thought, was cold and stern and passionless, and, besides, a flirtation was a harmless thing, and helped to give her gaiety and joy. But when the love of the King for her was taken away and he himself had gone forever out of her life, she realized not only the wrong she had done to others, but the far greater wrong she had done to herself, for it came to her that it was the King who would have brought her happiness—that not only was he most human and the highest, but that he was her true mate, and her piteous cry broke out, that has come down to us through all the ages.

"Ah, my God, What might I not have made of Thy fair world Had I but loved Thy highest creature here? It was my duty to have loved the highest It surely was my profit had I known.

It would have been my pleasure had I seen." Queen Guinevere never meant to pass the boundary lines of right and wrong, nor are we told that she did do any outbroken sin—it was only that she had killed the power of true loving in herself and wasted her queenliness on another than the King and when she recognized later that he was the real King of her life she had nothing whatever to give him but a repentant heart.

Now this is what I want to bring before you in this second article on a girl's relations to men—that the only safe thing to do is to keep away from the danger line. I am not speaking here of actual wrongdoing. Every girl knows that instinctively. Between what is unquestionably wrong and what is unquestionably right, like truth and falsehood, purity and impurity, loyalty and baseness, there are always clear distinctive lines. But often there is a place where moral boundaries are not so clear or so easy to define—and it is in the middle, debatable ground that the danger point always lies—no matter how smooth or fair the surface may seem, and it is here we need to keep to the right side with a good margin instead of seeing how near the edge we may come.

I do not want to seem too narrow or to be drawing the lines too tight and excluding what is really innocent, when I say that merely living up to the standards of the social set in which we move is not enough. If we are to be real queens among our sex we must be womanly and true and good with a margin, and the fact that many girls and many men of our acquaintance flirt is no true standard for ourselves if we would be true to our highest ideals of womanhood.

I've always had a lot of sympathy for the girl who said she wouldn't mind never being married, but she would certainly hate never having been asked, for she would then feel that something was wrong with her womanliness. Any girl has a right to the devotion which beauty and grace inspire,—it is her due; but flirtations, even the so-called innocent ones—are not necessary to one's enjoyment of life. A girl can be sane, good and careful and yet enjoy life to the full. I have never seen that anything whatever was gained by flirting; the girl who does not think of every man that she meets as a possible lover at all, but who goes on her own sweet way rejoicing and unconscious of how she may be impressing the opposite sex—who responds to friendliness of either man or woman with graciousness, will have more true lasting friendships and just as many lovers as her sister who is famed for her

ability to bring men to her feet.

Have you ever noticed that the man who himself flirts is not genuinely impressed by the girl who is given to the same thing? It is true he may spend quite a bit of time with her and even seem to be enjoying her company more than that of her quieter sister, but she is not the girl he chooses for his life-mate, nor even the girl whom he respects the most. The peculiar part of this man's mental make-up is that he can not see that his own actions are as little to be admired and often do far greater harm.

Two girls, both of whom I know intimately, were great friends, though social opposites—for one took it as her prerogative to bring any man to her feet and thought every new acquaintance a predestined lover—the other girl, quiet—a little timid, who not only had strong principles against it, but whom I suspect, would not have known how to flirt even had she been so inclined, were invited to a certain house party held in their honor—men had been invited for each girl there, among whom was one, a very prominent man, both then and now, and who for years had held the record for breaking hearts. No girl, it was said, could withstand his charm, and I know myself of some half dozen girls who considered themselves deeply in love with him.

On this occasion, he was, by common consent, given over to the girl who was his equal in breaking hearts, too. They had been at the same place for a week in the summer previous, and so had already started their course in flirtation, and each thought the other already deeply smitten

by their charms. The quieter girl did not speak more than a dozen sentences to him the entire time, for though she was no prude, she was enjoying her own associations with the other guests, and all the thought she gave this man particularly, though she recognized his brilliancy and a certain fascination—was that the two of them were carrying things pretty far when they laughingly kissed each other because of a dare to do it. But the sequel was more interesting. After their return, while she was listening daily to the story of the other's conquest and sympathizing with her queries as to whether after all she should succumb to his devotion and marry him, she herself received a letter from the very man telling her how he ad-

mired her womanliness, how he would value her friendship, and that the other one meant nothing to him—all the time he had been anxious to know her—and asking if he could come to see her; at the same time having the friend at whose house they had been entertained, write also urging his claims, saying that he cared nothing for the other girl and had, in fact, been quite appalled when she allowed him to kiss her.

Being a true friend, and at the same time disapproving of a man who would flirt and speak of the unwomanliness of the girl who would permit it, she refused, and steadfastly kept to that refusal through persistent appeals, even though she often found it a good bit for her sense of humour to listen to the other woman's tales of her conquest, especially that the man was heart-broken when she became engaged to some one else.

You see that flirts, whether they be men or women, are often more irresistible in their own eyes than in another's, even though that other be the very one who is seeming to yield to their charms. Another man I know who has always found himself sought out and bowed down to by women in general, because of his really charming ways, and who has had the usual number of girls tell him of their love, a man who even yet says he sees nothing so very wrong in flirting, in speaking of a certain friend said to me, "Oh, I never flirted with her, she is too true a woman for that, and then I respected her too much," and he also chose for his wife a girl who never had flirted in her life.

And not only are flirtations not necessary, it will yet have to be proven to me that they are harmless. I am not speaking here of broken hearts where on one side the thing meant nothing. We all know the wrong that is done there, nor of the actual temptations that the so-called innocent flirtations will put in another's way, although I fear this side of it is greater than many a girl ever realizes; but of the harm that is done to oneself and one's womanhood by the countless little cases that have no moral wrong in them.

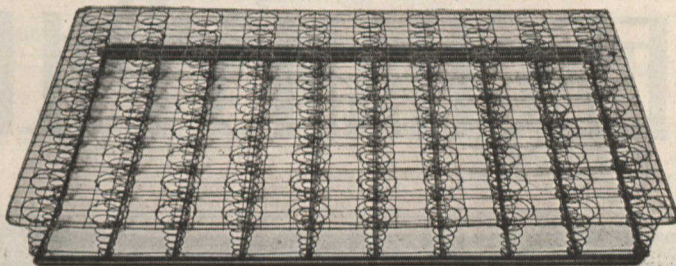
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