

About Husband and Wife

Marriage, as the civilized world today accepts it, represents what is undoubtedly the final and absolute result of unnumbered centuries of human experience. Like so much else in life, it is not the ideal solution of a momentous problem, it is at the best a compromise between the best solution of which mankind is capable. It serves its purpose, and on the whole, serves it very well. Substitutes for the monogamous union, so far as any have been suggested by theorists, are discredited by the fact that they all represent steps of social evolution beyond which the world has long since passed in its upward march toward moral stability and social peace. Promiscuity was abandoned when men and women ceased to rove about with their fellow animals, and when the first glimmerings of the social instinct came to them, with the notion of subordinating this unlimited freedom of the individual to the common welfare. The so-called "benah-marriage," the polyandrous marriage, and finally the polygamous marriage, have each and all been tried and then discarded. If they still exist, they exist in strata of civilization lower than our own and they are among the more striking indications of racial inferiority.

The sex-relation is the most important of all the relations which the sociologist, the jurist, and the physiologist have to study, for it exercises the most profound influence upon the life and happiness of the individual man and woman. Through the laws of heredity it determines even before birth, if not our destiny, at least our tendencies. It sends us into this great, terrible, enigmatical maze of life, either strong to conquer and mighty to resist; or else weak and helpless from the start, the victims of physical infirmities, or the led slaves of transmitted appetites. And in our own lives, what a wonderful power it exerts! It turns or it shackles; it glorifies or it disgraces; it blesses or it blasts.

Now marriage is the outward, visible, religiously and legally sanctioned acceptance of the sex-relation by human society. It represents the regulation and restriction of this relation in a way which is supposed to be at once the wisest for the community at large and for the individual as an individual. Like all general enactments it is based upon rules and ignores exceptions. It assures the greatest good for the greatest number, and in particular cases it leans heavily upon some, nevertheless it is accepted as being, on the whole, the best thing for the social and political organism. One must acknowledge that this assumption is in reality a true one. The test of centuries has served to justify it, as a still longer test has justified the assumption upon which the whole fabric of our civilization rests—that by yielding up the unrestricted freedom which the primitive man possessed for the modified and regulated freedom which the civilized man accepts, the sum total of human happiness is increased and also guaranteed forever. And this is true. For of the millions upon millions of marriages which are entered into under the conditions which are essentially the same in every Occidental nation, it is impossible to deny that the great majority of them are happy in a large sense. They afford stability to the social system. They knit the community together by the firm bonds of interwoven interests. They give an intelligible and consistent basis for the transmission of property. And in the main they tend to preserve comfort and tranquillity. In so far as they fall short of giving perfect happiness, they only share in the limitations which are inseparable from every human institution—limitations which find their source in the weakness and perversity of human nature.

This because exceptions to a rule, when sufficiently numerous and insistent, will always attract attention, the exceptions to the general rule that marriage makes for happiness have always been a subject for discussion and for arguments. This fact is reflected in literature by an untiring flow of gibes and jests of which marriage is the subject. It is reflected in legislation by laws which make provision for divorce. It is reflected in philosophic theory by abstract speculations as to whether our existing views of marriage might not be gradually but radically modified to the general advantage. Under the circumstances, it has always seemed to me that the most profitable subject for debate is not a change in the external conditions of marriage as they now exist, but rather an inquiry into what it is that makes for happiness in marriage and what for serious unhappiness. For it is not likely that after twenty centuries of ex-

perience that has been fairly justified in its results, the world will ever alter anything so fundamental as an institution which has been evolved by necessity, strengthened by custom, dignified by law, and hallowed by religion, and which is associated in some way or other with every phase of human life as we now see it. The subject is therefore one which is best approached from its psychological side, with the purpose of considering, not how marriage may be dispensed with or how its obligations may be altered, but rather how the men and women of our modern world may best make it serve the ends for which it was intended.

Every great institution that has gradually come into being has one interesting characteristic about it, and this characteristic is the circumstance that it was not developed in accordance with a conscious theory, but that on the contrary it affords material for the deduction of a theory. So it is with marriage. Looking at the monogamous union, we see that it rests upon a fundamental principle which may be set forth in the following manner: A man and a woman are first attracted to one another by the natural impulse of mating, by a species of selection whose basis is primarily physical. Their preference for each other, originating thus, increases and gains strength for a time and holds them fast until the impulse has spent something of its force. The theory of the monogamous union is that this period of physical attraction will last long enough for other ties to be formed between them. These other ties come from the community of interests between man and wife, interests which multiply and grow more complex every day through the intimacies of the life together which extend to a thousand little half-perceived yet in the mass extremely important actions, sayings, thoughts and memories, and finally from the habits which arise out of these intimacies and which are powerful precisely in proportion as they are unnoticed. Therefore, when the ardor of pure passion wanes and when outside of marriage its waning would naturally lead to separation and a reversion to individual independence, these other bonds are strong enough to banish any thought of breaking them. The conventions of society also play a part in strengthening the union, by rendering its dissolution if not impossible, at any rate both difficult and disagreeable. It follows, then, that marriage represents to most of those who enter it, a condition which is permanent, for the reason that to keep it so is to follow the line of least resistance.

As a matter of fact, indeed, the number of really unhappy marriages is a very small one. It is seen large to the casual reader of newspaper, this is because the happy marriage, like the happy nation, is one which has no history; and when not even an approximation to complete contentment is attained, still the discontent is not usually marked enough to bring about an actual break. We hear of the marriages that are failures; but the very fact that we hear of them and that so much is said about them, shows that they are in reality exceptional. In the main, the institution has been justified in its results.

Yet while this is true of the great majority of marriages, it is worth while to note that the exceptions are important, too; the more so when examined, they really prove the soundness of the general theory. Marriage, as we have seen, is supposed to imply first of all a natural selection based on the sex-instinct; and in the second place a community of interest succeeding the early and less binding motives. Experience shows that where these two requirements exist, these marriages are also invariably successful in establishing a contented home. An unhappy marriage really means, then, that the two requirements have not in a particular case been satisfied. Either the sharers in it were attracted to each other from the very first in unequal degrees; or else something prevented the development of the community of interest.

The most disgusting fact with which the sociologists have to deal, lies in the evidence that it is in the more or less cultivated classes that one finds marriage becoming less and less successful. Where the household is so simple as to make its conduct a matter of anxiety to husband and wife alike, there they both go on contented with each other; for the common interest is forced upon them. They have the same anxieties, the same hopes, the same pleasures, the same rewards. They do not have the time or the inclination to enjoy the luxury of making each

other miserable. They are by external pressure quickly crushed into that unity of purpose which is the essence of true marriage.

But of late the change in the status of woman has introduced a new element into the general problem; or rather it has given an extraordinary importance to an element which was formerly a fairly negligible quantity. The traditional marriage depended upon the correct adjustment of conditions that were physical and material. Marriage today is becoming more and more dependent for its success upon the adjustment of conditions that are psychical. I called attention in a former paper to the influence which the widening of women's interests has had upon their willingness to marry. This influence is still more marked upon their capacity to attain and to give contentment in the marriages they make. Whereas in former generations, it was sufficient that the union should involve physical reciprocity, in this age of ours the union must involve a psychic reciprocity as well. And whereas, heretofore, the community of interest was attained with ease, it is now becoming far more difficult because of the tendency to discourage a woman who marries from merging her separate individuality in her husband's. Yet unless she does this, how can she have a complete and perfect interest in the life together, and for that matter how can he have such an interest either? Mrs. Stetson-Gilman's notion that in their occupations they should be wholly independent of each other looks to a state of things which would ultimately mean the discontinuance of marriage altogether; for in marriage it must be all or nothing. There must be a complete absorption of two lives in one common existence, or else the two must still remain eternally apart. Man and wife must grow closer and closer together or they must become farther and farther removed from the perfect understanding which alone will enable them to face the world with fearlessness and faith.

As to the psychic element in marriage, this demands a fuller and a different kind of love than that which is purely primitive and emotional. It is no longer enough that the attraction which comes from passion should exist when marriages are made. In our introspective, analytical age, this even from the outset is insufficient. It will not tide the pair over the first eventful year of marriage. It will bring satiate far more quickly than it ought to do, and it will end in the sort of marriage which Tolstoy has so terribly depicted in the pages of his "Kreutzer Sonata," and which he has so falsely taken as typical of every marriage. What is essential now to happiness in the union of those who have felt the modern tendency to self-analysis, is the larger love into which liking also enters. In the past, women have made lamentable failures of their lives by taking, in their ignorance, men whom they liked and did not love. The danger today is that they may take the men whom they love but do not like. To forget this is to run the risk of moral shipwreck. Love, in the old sense, is a thing of casual moments—of hours or, if you will, of days—but the love that also likes, and that is unselfish and eternal, it can do more than quicken and thrill and shake those who are under the spell of passion. It finds its source in a deep contentment that is spiritual no less than physical. It never dies. It is loyal and devoted. It is unselfish in its every thought, and it does not pass away with the ecstasies of sensation. It is the essence of true comradeship, waiting always to take up the torch which Love so frequently lets fall, and to keep the flame still brightly burning, that it may cheer and warm and comfort and not scorch.

A well-known Italian critic, Signor Federigo Roberto, not long ago expressed a strong belief that Balzac's greatest piece of luck consisted in his dying very soon after his marriage with Mme. Hanska, since had he live, he would have found a bitter disappointment in the union. This statement seems at first a rather shocking one; for the devotion of this extraordinary man to the one woman of his life makes one of the most beautiful and interesting chapters in the whole history of romantic love. Existing as he did for her alone for more than eighteen years, dedicating all the passionate intensity of his being, it has always seemed a most pathetic end, that so sooner was she wholly free to marry him than he died. Yet there is reason to suppose that what Signor Roberto says is true. Balzac had both sides of his nature developed to a remarkable degree. He was physically a giant; he was psychically a giant, too. But the mystic, dreamy, tantalizing Polish woman who swayed his soul so absolutely by her profound understanding of it, was really a fit

mate for him upon his psychic side alone. That she felt her limitations is clear from the fact that she did not marry him as soon as she was free to do so, but made him wait through two more agonizing years of expectation. Had she been his mate completely, nothing whatever would have kept them sundered. She would have come to him even had it been over coals of fire.

The lesson of this seems to be that the true marriage for those who are not merely proletarians must involve the perfect balance of these two essential qualities; that absolute harmony of life in marriage is for those alone who can give as much as they receive; and that marriage is fortunately only in proportion as it approximates to this ideal. In most marriages, however, that are not happy it is the wife rather than the husband who is oftenest disappointed. Men are today very much the same as they have always been, while women have become far more exacting, because less dependent, than they used to be. They are more keenly alive to their temperamental necessities; they understand themselves much better, and therefore they expect to be much better understood. In former times, when marriage disappointed them, the disappointment was but vaguely felt and was ill-defined, or rather not defined at all. Today the modern woman knows her own nature thoroughly, and is quick to feel its demands whenever they become insistent.

Hence, in marriage, the modern woman is a clear-eyed judge of the inadequacies of her mate, and no illusion lasts for very long. Apart from the fundamental satisfaction of the sex-instinct, pure and simple, the normal woman makes two other demands upon him with whom she seeks to live out her whole life, and one of these demands is for sentiment, and the other for the finer understanding. First of all for sentiment—not sentimentality—because sentiment gives the magic touch which can make beautiful and noble that which without it is repellent and almost brutish. And understanding—the finer understanding—must exist, because without it there can never spring up the perfect liking which completes and envelops love, and saves it from the bitterness of an early death. Perhaps, in reality, sentiment and the finer understanding are one and the same. Certainly they are most intimately joined, just as feeling is linked with penetrative thought; but however this may be, the absence of them is fatal to a woman's happiness in marriage.

Pitiful is the mistake of the woman who marries before she really knows. In the end, passion will find her cold, kindness will only exasperate her, constancy will earn from her something very like contempt. She would rather be beaten once a week, she would welcome the heartburnings of jealousy, she would endure the heavy-heartedness of neglect—anything rather than the heavy, unintelligent, complacent, domestic deal level of fatuity which always does the right thing at the wrong time and never knows the difference or even dreads that there exists a difference. What will not a woman endure if she can only have her compensations! When Thackeray made Blanche Amory cry out, "If I had any emotions!" he thought that he was giving the final touch to a picture of selfish insincerity; but he was really expressing the eternal formula of femininity, and was more profound than he supposed. For in this, Blanche Amory was not an individual at all, but a type of her whole sex. Emotion—not vulgar, cheap, theatrical emotion, but the deep satisfaction which suffuses itself with a thrill throughout a woman's very soul when every mood of hers is met instinctively—that sort of emotion is the very essence of her being, and the lack of it is spiritual death. For nothing in the world can take the place of it. You will see husbands who are kindly, fond of home, and married to women who are upright, conscientious and intensely honorable, and yet their homes will be unhappy to the verge of anguish. The wife can find no fault in anything that is external; yet her nerves may be strained to the snapping-point whenever she is with her husband, so that his mere presence makes her wish that she could die—and just because of his intolerable obtuseness, his utter blindness to the fact that the greatest thing in life to her is not the payment of the cook, or the decoration of the house, or the clumsy, blundering affection that is perhaps more maddeningly irritating than all else, but rather a supreme appreciation of the shades of feeling, an appreciation of which he has no more conception than he has of the interstellar spaces.

For proletarians all this complexity in married life has no existence. The daily struggle for material advantage keeps them in the primitive condition of our ancestors. But more and more each year, this terrible in-

compatibility between the still undeveloped man and the rapidly developing woman intrudes itself upon the notice of the student of our modern life. It raises the perplexing question of the ignorance of women when they make the most momentous choice that they are ever called upon to make, and it demands to know the tests by which, before the final step is taken, the possibility of error can be recognized and thus avoided. How can a woman know that she will not be a mere spiritual bankrupt in a marriage that is open to her? To answer this question is in itself to undertake a book; but safe guidance, so far as it goes, can be found in the precept of a famous Roman who sagaciously declared: "If you are doubtful about any action, do not do it."—Rafford Pyke.

She—Papa agrees to pay half the cost of furnishing a house for us.
He—But how about the other half?
She—Don't be silly. Of course we'll buy stuff only half as expensive.
—Town Topics.

Simkins—They tell me your father aspires to a seat in the United States senate.
Timkins—Yes, but I'm afraid the old man will never reach.
Simkins—Why not?
Timkins—He's only worth half a million and isn't a pugilist.—Chicago News.

Old Gentleman—Throw away that vile cigar.
Teament Jim—Not much, mister, go an' find yer own butt!—Ohio State Journal.

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