

Motor and Wife

Reflections upon their Choice

Mr. Arnold Bennett has been telling us to choose a wife as we choose our motor-cars. A sensible man chooses a motor-car not so much by its colour and upholstery, but by its engine-power and smooth running. Similarly, though looks and form are not to be disregarded among the claims of a prospective wife, good temper (which is smooth running) and household management (which is engine-power) are still more important. We are advised, further, to make dispassionate, impartial and tactful inquiries about the lady (as we do about cars) in order to discover whether her private manners are markedly different from her show-room manners. The analogy between marriage and the purchase of a motor-car breaks down, in fact, only in one respect—that there can be no trial run before marriage.



"Stepping Into Daddy's Shoes"
Master John Nelson Kerr,
Summer, Christchurch

Something Better Than Romance

How much wiser Nature is than Mr. Arnold Bennett! Has it never struck him that the proportion of married men who are satisfied with their wives is greater than that of the car-owners who are satisfied with their cars? I have no figures of divorce by me, and I cannot carry figures in my head, but the number of unhappy marriages is surprisingly small, especially when you consider how rashly some people enter into the state of matrimony. The truth is that if a man and a woman like each other, the odds are that they will get on quite well together.

The romance goes fairly soon—perhaps the sooner the better, for romance is a difficult thing to sit down to breakfast with, but in the vast majority of cases it is succeeded by something that is more durable and permanent than passion—namely, friendship, mutual loyalty

and helpfulness, and the possession of common interests.

Man's First Love and Second

I have noticed that when men grow weary of their first love and begin a second the second shows a strange tendency to revert to the first type. The unfaithful husband commonly chooses someone who is an inferior version of his lawful wife—not, as you might imagine and as the books make out—someone who is her antithesis. Compare that with a man's treatment of his motor-cars. He can, if he is wealthy enough, get a car exactly to his own specification; but the odds are that when he gets another he will prefer another type altogether.

The car, again, when it is being sold makes no attempt to push itself, and is neither forward nor shy; the atmosphere of a sale is one of pure reason and cold calculation. And yet there are more mistakes made in the purchase of cars than there are in the marrying of wives. Consider, too, how simple is the task of the car and how enormously complicated the relationship of marriages; yet how seldom does the wife go back to her mother, and how often the car goes back to the maker.

The truth is that Nature is often wiser than reason. It has often been noted that tall men prefer small women, and *vice versa*. What a merciful thing that is. For if we contracted marriage as we buy a car, the tall man would marry a tall wife and the short man would have to be content with a little wife, with the result that in a few hundred years humans would be either dwarfs or sons of Anak.

Nature's Wise Balance

As with physical peculiarities, so with those of the mind and of character. Nature is always working for her norm and average. And is not that a scientific justification for that strangely unscientific process called falling in love? Just as our senses warn us of the approach of danger to life and health, so this falling in love comes from a deep instinct within us by which Nature preserves her balance of golden mediocrity, and humans have the best chance of attaining the settled happiness which lives neither on the peaks nor in the depths of emotion, but in the broad, fat, level plains of contentment.

The mechanical and intellectual view of marriage is wrong. If we choose our wives as we choose our cars, we should want to change the one as often as we do the other, which would indeed be a calamity. The happy marriage of man and woman is not a mathematical equation. It is a subtle chemistry, and just as the tongue can taste differences in wines that defy the analyst, so there are ethers in married happiness that only Cupid can detect.

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