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WHY HYMEN'S TORCH BURNS DIMLY.

THE philosophers say that this is not a marrying age. They assert that young men fight shy of wedded bliss, and that the torch of Hymen is lighted all too rarely. For this reason we have the portraits of those who marry, or some of them, in the papers, and people look at them admiringly and honour their courage. They are put side by side with distinguished generals and Arctic explorers. The ushers, best men, and bridesmaids come in for lesser distinction, receiving honourable mention, as it were. Such things did not obtain when marriages were more frequent, and the ceremony was regarded as an everyday occurrence.

Now among the reasons advanced for the decline of matrimonial stock is that the women of this century are more exacting than their grandmothers, require more pin money, more attention, and consider their personal ease and luxury paramount to everything. The home must be for them a gilded cage, where they are fed with sweetmeats, petted and flattered, and admiring crowds bidden to praise their plumage and hear them sing. But the doors of this cage must be ready to fly open at all times that they may step into a gilded chariot, with a purse full of golden pieces to spend at the cooing solicitations of the salesmen of the silk, fur or jewellery shops. When worn out with this pleasing exercise they again return to the cage; they must be bathed, and soothed and stimulated and perfumed and manicured, and made real pretty and comfortable until night comes, and then are tucked away under their satin coverlets to renew their freshness and beauty in sleep.

Such a charge the majority of women would indignantly deny and lay to the selfishness of the male this really alarming spread of spinsterhood. Willing to lavish all his spare change upon himself, they would say, upon his rich dinners, expensive wines and riotous living generally, he will leave the fairest flowers of the sex he should worship to wither because no hand will pluck them. He will forego the laugh of children about his knee, and the cosy fireside, and all the ornaments of home because he has made a god of himself and obstinately declines to worship at any other altar. Before that shrine, where is placed his own image, he sacrifices all the joys of domesticity and placates the idol with the incense of high-priced cigars and pours out plenteous libations of rosy wines, and wines that sparkle, and is not adverse to bacchantes moving in sensuous dance about the altar while chanting wild anthems where 'lips' rhyme with 'sips' and 'kisses' with 'blisses,' and the east blushes in the casement ere the revels are done.

There is truth in both charges. There is selfishness on both sides, and it would be difficult to say where the blame is the graver. Somehow the wedding bells do

not seem to ring with the same harmony as of yore. The discordancy of divorces in the near future is in their notes, and how true those woeful bodings are, the comparison between the marriage roll and the divorce muster will testify. The weird and bliss-smothering sisterhood who are familiar to us as 'failure to provide,' 'infidelity,' 'desertion,' and that most pestiferous mix of all, 'incompatibility of temper,' are ever ready, shears in hand, to cut the chords which should bind fond hearts together. Invisible, but still present, they occupy the front pews in church, speculating on a job. They bunch themselves into the floral temple where the happy couple are receiving the congratulations of their friends. They are the unbidden and unwelcome guests at the wedding breakfast. They touch with grim humour shadowy goblets when the health of the young people is proposed. They hover about and are critical of the wedding presents, doubting the genuineness of the silverware and having no faith in the cheque of the bride's papa, or even the deed for the dove-cote where the new household is to be established. They catch and munch with diabolical grimaces the rice cast after the departing twain, and would fain accompany them on their wedding journey if there were any room for them in the train.

Putting those things aside and forgetting that marriage is a lottery where it must regretfully be admitted, the blanks, like unto all lotteries, are vastly in excess of the prizes, the young bachelor in these days can enjoy himself hugely without a wife to manage his household. A comparatively new, but now a rapidly growing custom, is the union of three or four or more young men of congenial tastes, who hire a house or flat and set up house-keeping on their own account. The system is very simple, very practical, and is found in nearly all cases, to work admirably. They hire a good servant, who is also a good cook, and take turn about in catering for the mess. The servant cooks, attends to the chamber work and keeps the house clean. As the men only breakfast and dine at home his work is comparatively light, and he will find it to his interest to do it well, especially as there are no women in the house to bother him. When they return at night there is a good fire in the sitting-room, their slippers are set out, they can dine in their shirt sleeves if so disposed; there is no ceremony—none of the convenience necessary when ladies make up the party. The absence of formality is delightful, the perfect freedom and abandon most refreshing, the dinner well cooked and promptly served; no one to criticise any small overindulgence that may occur at table; smoking permitted in every part of the house; no apologies to be made for any trifling bursts of profanity; no wrangling over housekeeping bills; no requisitions for milliner stores to impair one's digestion.

Surely here are all the comforts of home, all the joys and virtues of domesticity, intensified a hundred fold.

The advantage of this sort of life over that of the hotel or boarding-house, for the bachelor of modest means, is manifest. With markets like ours, and with the expenses divided, he can live most sumptuously. At this season, when game is so cheap and plentiful, he can furnish forth his table with the choicest birds of marsh and upland. He has a wealth of vegetables from which to make his selection. He can stock his cellar with sound native wines, with here and there a case of the imported article for state occasions. He can entertain his friends and give them a shakedown if the night be too wet, and all for a figure so moderate, presuming of course, that those affairs are administered with discretion, that the caterer can almost declare a dividend every sixty days. This Bohemian life, if a life which runs in such even channels may be called Bohemian, is a powerful and insidious enemy to marriage. It is absolutely without worry, and is capable of infinite novelty. There can be lady days, when the girls with their chaperones are invited, and permitted to enjoy for a brief space the pleasures of this bachelor paradise. And while they enjoy, they envy. It seems to them an usurpation of those things wherein the woman should play the prominent part, and no doubt but it is. They behold a household without a queen, a republic where all are equal, a government, wise, beneficent, and harmonious, without the shadow of autocracy. They never dare to ask themselves if such a state of affairs could be possible with their sex. They know, alas, that the female temperament is against it, and that any community of women formed on such lines, could not succeed. It must inevitably 'burst up in a row,' because there would be cliques, and the cliques would clash, and the result would be dissolution. An Eveless Eden has proved its possibility, an Adamless Eden would be promptly turned over to the serpent.

Those festivities to which the ladies are permitted have, for the bachelor side of the matter, a wholesome effect. The contrast between the necessary restraint while the woman is in evidence and the utter release from compliment and attention when they depart urges the bachelor to bless his lot, and adds a fresh charm to his untrammelled life. True, there is an element of danger in those intimacies, a possibility that some susceptible member of the league may be captivated by a visiting siren, because girls are more free and easy, more natural and therefore more attractive at those bachelor jinks than elsewhere, but this is more than balanced by the lifting of the burden of conventionality when the last farewells are spoken and the gate of the bachelor fortress swings to again and the frowning guns once more threaten the spinsters from the battlements.



Heath's, photo.

COROMANDEL—LOWER TOWNSHIP AND HARBOUR.