

A MALE VIEW OF MARRIAGE.



A forcible article on the difficulty experienced by marriageable women in getting husbands, the *London Mercury*, after pointing out that the present monogamic system of marriage embodies the triumph of woman in civilisation, and showing that though Christianity has helped woman to secure the exclusive right and interest in the father of her children, she would have attained it all the same under Paganism, proceeds thus:—

While the men have been occupied with their politics, arts, and sciences, the women have been slowly improving and consolidating their position inch by inch. We have been too good-natured and too chivalrous to attempt to wrest their advantage from them, and the result is what we see—that marriage is an institution with almost indissoluble bonds and far-reaching responsibilities, all designed in the interests of the weaker party to the contract.

Well, having got matrimony into its present condition, how do the women work it? Being strong, are they merciful? I think married men will agree that the tendency is to work the system with considerable rigour. There must be no late nights at the club, no unusual expenditure of money that is not accounted for, no polite attentions to a strange lady. I have even heard of an agitation against lathkeys, tobacco in the drawing-room, lazing on Sunday afternoons, and other entirely innocent forms of masculine indulgence. The modern theory of marriage, of course, is that the wife, having drawn a husband out of the lottery, stands watch and ward over him so as to keep at a distance all possible rivals. This position men have tacitly accepted and if matrimony meant this, and only this, there would not perhaps be so much fault to find with it. But the woman, as we have seen, is inclined to push her advantage to the verge of tyranny. To return to the commercial metaphor, she sets a very high price upon marriage indeed. For the helpless man who becomes involved in it it is too often a state of continued self-denial, verging upon privation. I do not mean in the money sense exclusively, though that also has to be considered, but as regards the general amenities of life. Now, commercially, you cannot legitimately run up the price of an article without giving value for it. If you do not give value for it you must take the risk of the article remaining on your hands, and this is just the point, it seems to me, at which we have arrived in this marriage question. The average young man who puts his head in the matrimonial noose renounces (1) the employment of a considerable portion of a slender income, (2) a good many of his customary evening pastimes, (3) the delights of indiscriminate larking with the young persons of his acquaintance. And, in return for this what does he obtain? (1) A home which is not much better, although considerably dearer, than the one previously furnished him by his landlady; (2) the companionship of a wife who with her newly-acquired airs of authority, has ceased to be as nice as the unattached young ladies of his acquaintance, all of whom were wont to buzz around him like a fly in a jam tart; and (3) the paterfamilias of children, a boon which many authorities in these Malthusian times are inclined to view askance. Is the bargain an altogether desirable one for the average young man? The women may shout 'Yes,' in chorus until they are black in the face, but, meanwhile, the average young man, who is the other party to the bargain, shakes his head and walks away. In commercial language, he is not taking it on.

It is a matter of common observation that if men do not fall into matrimony in the callow period of the early twenties they take a run of bachelorhood till they are forty or more, and in a good many cases never marry at all. These must be something wrong with a system which, while it entraps unwary youths, tends to repel the man who is fully arrived at years of discretion. No amount of theorising about the blessedness of the married state will do away with this significant fact, that among men, after two or three and twenty, the marriage curve declines, not to rise again until they are getting into the serene and yellow. The conclusion clearly to be drawn is, that for men with all their wits about them, and in the prime of life, marriage, as at present organised, is not usually thought to be good enough. They find it rather a one-sided bargain, and they will have none of it until they begin to want gruel or nightgowns, when the wife comes in handy as a sort of confidential nurse. The cry is not that women want to marry more than they used to do, but that men want to marry less. Every woman still wants a husband, but every man does not nowadays want a wife. Commercially speaking, wives ask too much for themselves, and the marriage market in consequence is dull. For it does not matter whether you pay for an article in hard cash or in self-denial, you pay for it all the same.

Matchmaking is no longer a question of bringing two congenial souls together. It is almost synonymous with trickery, and the reason is that it is hardly conducted upon fair principles, the young man being often lured into an alliance from which his better judgment, if left to itself, would probably recoil. I was discussing this question the other day with a marriageable young man of about thirty—rich, cultured, and idle, and living in a fashionable flat in the West-end, where he is waited upon hand and foot by servants. Many have been the attempts made to capture this desirable husband in posse. To me he talked of them with undisguised amusement. "I was nearly caught once," he said, "but that was some years ago. I was actually engaged for about a week. At the end of that time, thank Heaven, we had our first quarrel, my Daleines and I, and I took devilish good care that it should be the last. All the time I was enraged I felt I had been let into doing a foolish thing. "And now?" I inquired. "Ah, now," he replied, "I am a bit wiser. You won't catch me as at that sort of thing in a hurry. In vain is the net spread in the sight of the bird. Look at me," he added, "why should I marry? I have everything I want." This is not an exceptional case, and the more so the pity. London is full of such young men. They are not all rich or idle, but they are all pretty much of the same way of thinking. They have practically everything that they deem it worth while to live for. When they come to be fifty, perhaps some of them will reconsider their position; but, meanwhile, the women they ought to have married will have been stranded in old-maidenhood.

The only remedy for this state of things is to cheapen marriage—in other words to make it more attractive. Women have screwed up the bond so tight that it is in many cases irksome to bear. This bond must somehow be loosened so as to allow a healthy amount of play for masculine idiosyncrasies. I am not prepared to say exactly how the thing is to be done, or what is the best way of doing it; but, in a general way, it may be said that the constraints of marriage have been pushed a little too far in certain directions, and that the worst enemies of the bond are precisely the well-meaning people who are agitating in obvious defiance of Nature's precepts for a further equalisation of the sexes. It is worthy of note that the working classes are the marrying classes of our day. Now, it is precisely amongst those classes that the constraints of marriage are least felt. Working men and women know little of the deadly struggle of keeping up appearances, and, among them, the wife is, in sober truth, the helpmate of her husband which in the upper classes she so often fails to be. Undoubtedly the natural inclination of the sexes is to come together, and if any considerable number of eligible women remain unpaired the reason must be sought in the artificial conditions of marriage as a mode of life. I attach little importance to the natural inequality of the number of men and women respectively. It is the fact no doubt, that the consumption of male life is greater than that of female, and although the males are in a majority when born, at fifty years of age they are in a slight minority. About the marrying age, or what ought to be such, however, the sexes are tolerably equal, and if every Jack paired off with Jill the residue of single women would not be worth agitating about.

On the part of men there is probably as little real repugnance to marriage as there is on the part of Churchmen to the burying of Dissenters. It is not the ends but the means that is objected to. I can imagine a young man who hears of the hardships of nice young women in failing to find husbands, and in being denied the joys of maternity—I can imagine this young man, I say, repudiating warmly and very sincerely the alleged disinclination of his class to make the pretty dears happy, and exclaiming, "Not marry them! Why, I shouldn't mind marrying a dozen, if they will only say the word." It is invariably the case that when a law is made too stringent for the ordinary necessities of human nature it defeats its own purposes; it either falls into abeyance or human nature nature makes up in one channel overflows into another. The extremely complicated provisions of the French law of marriage are probably responsible for the excessive number of irregular unions in France, and the indulgence with which they are regarded—a point I commend to the attention of the morality-mongers in our midst. That polygamy is the true remedy for the existing state of things, as some bold spirits have suggested, I doubt; for in the countries where it prevails it is defeated partly by the natural instincts of mankind, and partly by the fact that there are not women enough to do much more than go round. Possibly increased facilities for divorce would have the effect of robbing marriage of some of its terrors. I make this suggestion with diffidence, and only because the case seems almost a desperate one. But, after all, it is a terribly serious business putting your hand into the bag and drawing out a partner with whom you are compelled to pass the remainder of your life whether you prove to be congenially mated or otherwise. There is a very wise Italian saying to the effect that all the brains are not in one head. It applies to nations no less than to individuals. Now, over a very wide stretch of human history, and even among civilisations that have been little, if at all, inferior to our own, a comparatively slight matrimonial bond has been deemed sufficient to safeguard the interests of the community. The tie of the children might be trusted more than it is to hold couples together. At the same time divorce being rendered possible, say, by mutual consent, men would probably hesitate less than they now do to incur the responsibilities of marriage.

I fear there is nothing for it but to apply to the matrimonial market the same inexorable laws that regulate other markets. The possible purchaser cannot be forced—he must be induced—to buy, and the most obvious means to this end is that women should abate some of those pretensions of theirs which are the bane of middle and upper class life. Their fault, like that of the Dutch in commerce, is giving too little and asking too much.

TO MAMIE.

BY MRS ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER.

When the violets are blooming
As they bloomed a year ago,
You will wander in the gloaming
Down the path we used to go.
Where their amethystine glimmer
Sparkles in the dewy grass,
Close beside the crystal river
You will call them as you pass.

Ah, I wonder, little Mamie,
If your pleasant thoughts will stray;
If in fancy you will name me
In my home so far away.
As you roam among the flowers
In the sunset's golden glow,
Will you wish I shared those hours
As I did one year ago?

When the violets are blooming—
Little flowers we loved so well,
When we wandered in the gloaming
Ere the deeper shadows fell—
Will you think that I am lonely
As I wander far from thee,
In that hour—that sweet hour only—
Mamie, will you think of me?

Heaven bless you, little Mamie,
Little tender-hearted maid!
May your life be pure and lovely
As a violet's in the shade.
May the Saviour's blest protection
Guard you ever as you stray.
And the flowers of sweet affection
Bloom along your sunny way.

WAIFS AND STRAYS.

THE base of contention is the jawbone.

Praise a man twice for something he did not do and he will be convinced that he did it.

With some people it is not their own troubles so much as the happiness of their neighbours that disturbs them.

There is nothing more difficult than to make a friend of a foe; nothing more easy than to make a foe of a friend.

'Take away woman,' asks a writer, 'and what would follow?' We would. Give us something hard next time.

'Let us remove temptation from the path of youth,' as the frog said when he plunged into the water, upon seeing a boy pick up a stone.

If you don't believe in the strength of insect life, watch the velvet little bumble bee, with the tropical polonaise, and see him lift a 200lb. picnic man out of the grass.

LEON V. TIGER.—It is popularly supposed that the lion is the most courageous and powerful of the carnivora, or at least of the feline; but on the few recorded occasions of a battle royal between the lion and the Bengal tiger the lion has come off second best. One such combat occurred recently at the Calcutta Zoo between an African lioness and a tigress. They were exhibited in adjoining compartments of the same cage, and the door having been carelessly opened between the two compartments the tigress rushed in and disposed of her rival in a fight which lasted about ten minutes.

A DREAMFUL EVEN.

They stood upon the mountain high,
And she said, 'See the view!'
To which the youth then made reply,
'I'd rather look at you.'

And, oh dear, how she snubbed that man!
Right scornfully said she,
'You've got to climb much higher than
You are to look at me!'

LOVE AND THE UNDERSTANDING.—Some one, speaking of a beautiful girl with enthusiasm, said he was almost in love with her, though her understanding was by no means brilliant. 'Pooh!' said Goethe, laughing, 'as if love had anything to do with understanding. We love a girl for different things than understanding. We love her for her beauty, her youth, her worth, her confidence, her character, with its faults, caprices, and Heaven knows what other inexpressible charms; but we do not love her understanding. Her mind we esteem (if it is brilliant), and it may greatly elevate her in our opinion; nay, more, it may enchain us when we already love. But her understanding is not that which awakens and inflames our passions.'

A GOOD GIRL.—A girl of eighteen years, the daughter of a sea captain, recently navigated her father's ship when he and all the crew were down with the yellow fever. The barque, a coasting vessel, bound from South America to Savannah, was last spoken at sea off Navassa, when all hands were reported ill with yellow fever, and no attempt was made by the vessel which reported her to give any assistance. The master of the barque had with him on board his only daughter, who appears to have been the last to catch the fever. With the aid of one or two sailors, who managed to crawl to the deck, she navigated the vessel for several hundreds of miles, and succeeded in reaching port with a crew dead and dying and the captain in a critical condition.

MATERNAL INSTINCT.—A short time ago a fire occurred, a mile and a-half from Southampton, and burned about ten rods of furze. There was no wind at the time. When the fire was extinguished some labouring men noticed that a little plot of heath in the centre of where the fire had been was not burned, and that the fire had burned everything round the heath, and had approached close to it. In looking about the men discovered a pheasant's nest containing six eggs among the heath. A few hours afterward the pheasant was seen sitting on the eggs. Some time after the nest was visited, and the parent bird was absent, but the eggs were nearly hatched. When the nest was again visited the pheasant had hatched the eggs, and carried off the young birds. It is remarkable that the heath was not burned, as it was perfectly dry, and it is believed that the pheasant had, by flapping her wings, kept the fire off.

THE FIDELITY OF WOMAN.—A young man who has recently related in a Bristol paper his experiences of a trip to Australia says:—"I met a fellow-passenger at Melbourne who had sent home for his intended wife; he had just been down to the boat with the certificate to meet her, and was ready to marry her, but lo! and behold, she would have nothing further to do with him, and went round to Sydney. She had fallen in with another man on the voyage whom she thought she would like better, but which I very much doubt. A woman on our ship was the pioneer in another case. She, too, had fallen in with a fellow, and had written home to her husband telling him not to follow. In another case on our ship a young married woman was going out to her husband. She openly avowed that if "so-and-so" (mentioning the name) asked her to elope with him "she would readily do so; but as he didn't she proceeded to her destination, giving some particulars of a short stay at Colombo."

OLD MEMORIES.—It was at a popular concert. The band was playing 'Reminiscences of Mendelssohn,' and a thousand heads were wagging an accompaniment. Suddenly by way of finale, the 'Wedding March' struck up. The effect was electrical. All over the audience the wedded pairs looked at each other and smiled tenderly. It was a reminiscence. What happy visions it called up! Here was a couple, homely, raw, from the country evidently, who had just started out to guide the plough together. The march had been played for them in the little village church not long ago, but now they heard it played indeed. They leaned a little closer together, and her big hand, fixed out to kill in cotton mits which showed the wedding ring, sought his and held it. And all through the audience I saw signs of the pictures called up by that fragrant and alluring music. Old couples and young, rich and poor, those who live like cats and dogs together, and those who have learned the pleasant alchemy of forbearance in wedded life, all were for the moment bewitched. Ta, ta, tara, tara, tum tiddle de dum di do. It fairly makes me reminiscent myself, though they played Wagner at my blessed wedding.