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Maids, Wives, and Bachelors

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Содержание

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Maids and Bachelors

Women who have devoted themselves for religious purposes to celibacy have in all ages and countries of the world received honor, but those upon whom celibacy has been forced, either through the influence of untoward circumstances, or as a consequence of some want or folly in themselves, have been objects of most unmerited contempt and dislike. Unmerited, because it may be broadly asserted that until the last generation no woman in secular and social life remained unmarried from desire or from conviction. She was the victim of some natural disadvantage, or some unhappy circumstance beyond her control, and therefore entitled to sympathy, but not to contempt.

Of course, there are many lovely girls who appear to have every advantage for matrimony, and who yet drift into spinsterhood. The majority of this class have probably been imprudent and over-stayed their market. They have dallied with their chances too long. Suddenly they are aware that their beauty is fading. They notice that the suitable marriageable men who hung around them in their youth have gone away, and that their places are filled with mere callow youths. Then they realize their

mistakes, and are sorry they have thought being "an awfully silly little thing" and "having a good time" the end of their existence. Heart-aches and disappointments enough follow for their punishment; for they soon divine that when women cease to have men for lovers, and are attended by school-boys, they have written themselves down already as old maids.

Closely allied to these victims of folly or thoughtlessness are the women who remain unmarried because of their excessive vanity – or natural cruelty. "My dear, I was cruel thirty years ago, and no one has asked me since." This confession from an aunt to her niece, though taken from a play, is true enough to tell the real story of many an old maid. Their vanity made them cruel, and their cruelty condemned them to a lonely, loveless life. Close observation, however, among the unmarried women of any one's acquaintance will reveal the fact that it is not from the ranks of silly or cruel women that the majority of old maids come. Men do not, as a rule, dislike silly women; and by a wise provision of nature, they are rather fond of marrying pretty, helpless creatures who cannot help themselves. Neither are cruel women universally unpopular. Some lovers like to be snubbed, and would not value a wife they had not to seek upon their knees. There are, therefore, always chances for the silly and cruel women.

It is the weak, colorless women, who have privately strong prejudices, and publicly no assertion of any kind, that have, even in youth, few opportunities. They either lack the power to love strongly or they lack the power to express their feelings. They

have not the courage to take any decided step. They long for advances, and when they are made, recoil from them. They are constitutionally so timid that they fear any step or any condition which is a positive and final change. If marriage had some reservations and uncertainties, some loopholes through which they could drag themselves as a final resort, they would be more sure of their own wishes. These are the Misses Feeble-minds, who cast the reproach upon feminine celibacy.

They feel that in some way they have been misunderstood and wronged, and they come finally to regard all other women as their enemies. They worry and fret themselves continually, and the worry and fret sharpen alike their features and their temper. Then their condition is precisely the one most conducive to complaining and spiteful gossiping; and they fall, in their weakness and longing for sympathy, to that level. Thus to the whole class is given a reputation for malevolent railing which does not by any means belong to it. In fact, married women are generally more venomous than old maids. The words of married women have greater weight, and they do more harm; for they can make suggestions and accusations which an old maid could not make with any propriety. An old maid's gossip is generally without intentional malice; she has nothing to do, and she wants to make herself agreeable; while married women, having plenty else to do, must, as a general thing, talk scandal from pure ill-nature.

There is a large majority of old maids who are to be

sincerely respected, and from whose numbers men with sense and intelligence may choose noble wives. They are the pretty, pure, sensible women who have been too modest, and too womanly, to push and scramble in the social ranks. They have dwelt in their own homes, and among their own people, and no one has sought them out. They have seen their youth pass away, and all their innocent desires fade, and they have suffered what few can understand before they reached that calm which no thought of a lover troubles. Sweet faded flowers! How tenderly we ought to regard these gentle victims of those modest household virtues which all men profess to admire, but which few seem desirous to transplant into their own homes.

Another class, somewhat kindred to this, is composed of women who have never found their ideal, and have never allowed themselves to invent for any other man those qualities which would elevate him to their standard. And these women, again, are closely allied to those who remain unmarried because they do not, and will not, conform to conventionalities and social rules. They are clever and odd, and likely to remain odd, especially if they refuse to men – as they are most likely to do – that step or two in advance which is the only way to reconcile them to witty or intellectual women.

These varieties of unmarried women are mainly the victims of natural peculiarities, or of circumstances they are not responsible for. But within the last generation the condition of feminine celibacy has greatly altered. It is a fact that women in this

day, considerately, and in the first glory of their youth, elect themselves to that condition. Some have imbibed from high culture a high conception of the value of life, and of what they ought to do with their lives; and they will not waste the days of their youth in looking for a husband in order to begin their work. Others have strong individuality, and refuse to give up their time into another's keeping. The force of character displayed by such resolutions naturally leads to celibacy. No one but a very weak man would be attracted by women of such vital purpose, and weak men would not be tolerated by such strong women.

The wise and the thoughtful may well give such voluntary old maids the full credit of their purpose, for the generality will not believe in resolutions so much above their own consciences and intelligence. They will still sneer at their condition, and refuse to admit that it is of choice. They will throw at them that wearisome old fable of the fox and the grapes, when they might much more correctly quote Sappho's song of the ripe apples left on the topmost branches of the apple-trees: "Not because they were forgotten of the gatherers, but because *they were out of their reach*."

In accord with the fresh development, we are told that the number of unmarried women in the country is steadily on the increase. But this increase will not be ranged among the silly, the weak, or the cruel of the sex. It will come from that class of women whose eyes have been opened by the spread of education and refinement; women not afraid to work for themselves, and

who indeed have thoughtfully concluded that their own efforts and their own company will be far better for them than the help and company of any man not perfectly in sympathy with them, or their inferior either in moral or mental calibre. For it is not always a duty to marry; but it is always a duty to live up to our highest conception of what is right and noble and elevating.

But from whatever cause the women of the present and future generations remain unmarried, they will have no need to dread the condition, as unmarried women of the previous generations have had good cause to do. Every year finds them more independent. They are constantly invading fresh trades, and stepping up into more important positions. They live in pretty chambers; they dress charmingly; they have a bank account; they go to the opera and the theatres in their own protection; and instead of being the humble poor relations of married sisters and brothers, they are now their equals, their patrons, and their honored guests. Besides which, old maids have begun to write novels; and in them they have given us such exquisite portraits of their order – women so rich in every womanly grace – hat we are almost compelled to believe the unmarried women in our midst to be the salt of the community.

At any rate, we are beginning to shift the blame and the obloquy of the position to the old bachelors, where it rightly belongs; and this is at least a move in the just and proper direction. For old bachelors have no excuse whatever for their condition. If we omit the natural and necessary exceptions,

which are few enough, then pure selfishness and cowardice must account for every other case. Their despised old-bachelorhood is all their own fault. They have always had the tremendous privilege of asking for what they wanted; and half the battle was in that privilege. Men don't have wives because they don't ask for them; and they don't ask for them because they don't want them; and in this condition lie their shame and their degradation, and the well-deserved scorn with which the married part of both sexes regard them.

Men are also much more contemptible and useless in their celibacy than are women. An old maid can generally make herself of service to some one. If she is rich, she attaches herself to church work, or to art, or to the children of brothers and sisters. Or she travels all over the world, and writes a book about her adventures. If she is poor, she works hard and saves money; and thus becomes an object of interest and respect in her own set. Or she is nurse and helper for all that need her help in her village, or her church, or her family. At any rate, she never descends to such depths of ennui and selfishness as do the old bachelors who loll about on the club sofas, or who dawdle discontentedly at afternoon teas. An old maid may be troublesome in church business, or particular in household affairs; but it takes an old bachelor to quarrel with waiters and grumble every one insane about his dinner menu. An old maid may gossip, but she will not bore every one to death about her dyspepsia; and if she has to starve others, we may be very certain she would never fall

under that tyranny of valets and janitors which are the "sling and arrows" of wealthy, selfish old bachelors.

On the whole, then, the unmarried woman is becoming every year more self-reliant, and more respectable and respected, and the unmarried man more effeminate and contemptible. We look for a day, not far off, when a man will have to become a member of some religious order if he wishes a reputable excuse for his celibacy; and even in secular life it would not be a bad idea to clothe bachelors after forty years of age in a certain uniform. They might also after that age be advised to have their own clubs and recreations; for their assumption of equality with those of their sex who have done their duty as men and citizens is a piece of presumption that married men ought to resent. Men who marry are the honorable progenitors of the future; and their self-denying, busy lives not only bless this generation, but prepare for the next one. The old bachelor is merely a human figure, without duties and without hopes. Nationally and socially, domestically and personally, he is a spoon with nothing in it!

The American Girl

One of the most interesting, piquant, and picturesque of all types of feminine humanity is the American girl, – not the hothouse variety, reared for the adornment of luxury, but the every-day, every-where girls that throng the roads leading to the public schools and the normal schools, and who, even, in a higher state of culture fill the halls of learned colleges with a wondrous charm and brightness, – girls who have an aim in life, a mission to fulfil, a home to order, who know the worth of money, who are not ashamed to earn it, and who manage out of limited means to compass all their desires for pretty dresses and summer vacations, and even their pet dream of an ocean voyage and a sight of the Old World.

Physically, these girls enjoy life at its highest point. Look at their flushed cheeks and bright, fearless eyes, and watch their light, swift, even steps. They have no complaint to make of the heat, or the sunshine, or the frost; they have not yet heard of the east wind. Rain does not make them cross; and as for the snow, it throws them into a delicious excitement; while the wind blowing their dresses about them in colored clouds only makes them the more eager to try their strength against it.

That these girls so physically lovely should have the proper mental training is a point of the gravest personal and national importance. And it is the glory of our age that this necessity has

been nobly met. For the American girl, "Wisdom has builded her house and hewn out her Seven Pillars;" and as she points to the lofty entrance she cries to all alike, "Go up; the door is open!" If the girls of fifty years ago could have known the privileges of our era how would they have marvelled and rejoiced and desired "to see their day."

But manifold as her privileges are, the American girl generally knows how to use them. She proves daily that the parable of the ten talents did not refer to men only. Indeed, the fault girls are most likely to fall into is the belief that they each and all possess every one of the talents. In reality this is so seldom the case that it is impossible to educate all girls after one pattern; and it is therefore a grand thing for a girl to know just what she can and cannot do. For if she have only five talents there is no advantage to be gained by creating fictitious ones, since the noblest education is that which looks to the development of the natural abilities, whether they be few or many, fashionable or unfashionable.

Ask the majority of people "What is education?" and they will be apt to answer "The improvement of the mind." But this answer does not take us one step beyond the starting-point. Probably the best and most generally useful rule for a girl is a deliberate and conscientious inquiry into her own nature and inclinations as to what she wants to do with her education. When she has faithfully answered the inquiry she is ready to prepare herself for this end. For it is neither necessary nor yet possible that every girl should

know everything. Besides which, the growth of individuality has made special knowledge a thing of great value, and on all occasions of importance we are apt to defer to it. If we cross the Atlantic we look for a captain who has a special knowledge of its stormy ways. If we are really ill we go to a specialist on our ailment, no matter what "pathy" we prefer. Special knowledge has a prima facie worth, and without inquiry into a subject we are inclined to consider specialists on the subject better informed than those who have not this qualification. Hence the importance of cultivating some one talent to such perfection as will enable a girl, if need be, to turn it into money.

There is another point in the preparation of the American girl for the duties of life which is often undervalued, or even quite ignored; it is the little remembered fact that all our moral and intellectual qualities are very dependent for their value on our surroundings. The old Quakers used to lay great stress upon being "in one's right place." When the right person is in the right place there is sure to be a success in life; failure in this respect is almost certain misfortune; a fine accountant before the mass, a fine lady in the wilderness, are out of their places, and have lost their opportunity. And so educational accomplishments which would bring wealth and honor in a great city may be detrimental to happiness and a drag on duty in an isolated position.

Hence the importance of a girl finding out first of all what she wants to do with her education. For in this day she is by no means cramped in her choice; the most desirable occupations are

open to her; she may select from the whole world her arena, and from the fullness thereof her reward. But if her object be a more narrow and conventional one, if all she wishes is to be loved and popular in her own small community, then – if she is wise – she will cultivate only such a happy arrangement of graceful, usual accomplishments as prevail among her class and friends. For a very clever woman cannot be at home with very many people. She is too large for the regular grooves of society; she does not fit into any of its small aims and enjoyments; and though she may have the kindest heart, it is her singularities only that will be taken notice of. If, then, popularity be a girl's desire, she must not obviously cultivate herself, must not lift herself above her surroundings, nor lift her aspirations higher than the aims which all humanity have in common. And it is a very good thing for humanity that so many nice girls are content and happy with such a life object; for the social and domestic graces are those which touch existence the closest, which sweeten its bitter griefs and brighten its dreariest hours.

It would be foolish to assert that the American girl is without faults. Physically and mentally, she may stand on her merits with any women in the world; morally, she has the shortcomings that are the shadows of her excellences. Principally she is accused of a want of reverence, and setting aside for the present her faults as a daughter, it may be admitted that in general she has little of this quality. But it is largely the consequence of her environments. Reverence is the virtue of ignorance; and the American girl has

no toleration for ignorance. She is inquisitive, speculative, and inclined to rely on her own investigations; while the spirit of reverence demands, as its very atmosphere, trust and obedience. It is therefore more just to say that she is so alert and eager herself that when she meets old men and women who have learned nothing from their last fifty years of life, and who therefore can teach her nothing, she does not feel any impulse to offer reverence to mere years. But if gray hairs be honorable, either for matured wisdom, extensive information, or practical piety, she is generally inclined to give that best of all homage, the reverence which springs from knowledge and affection, and which is a much better thing than the mere forms of respect traditionally offered to old age.

It is also said that the American girl is a very vain girl, fond of parading her beauty, freedom, and influence. But vanity is not a bad quality, if it does not run to excess. It is the ounce of leaven in a girl's character, and does a deal of good work for which it seldom gets any credit. For a great deed a great motive is necessary; but how numberless are the small social and domestic kindnesses for which vanity is a sufficient force, and which would be neglected or ill-done without its influence! As long as a girl's vanity does not derive its inspiration from self-love there is no necessity for her to wear sackcloth to humiliate it. We have all known women without vanity, and found them unpleasant people to know.

There is one fault of the American girl which is especially her

fault, and which ought not to be encouraged or palliated although it is essentially the shadow of some of her greatest excellences – the fault of being in too great a hurry at all the turning-points of her life. When she is in the nursery she aches to go to school. When she is a schoolgirl, she is impatient to put on long dresses and become a young lady. As soon as this fact is accomplished, she feels there is not a moment to lose in choosing either a career or a husband. She is always in a hurry about the future, and so frequently takes the wrong turn at the great events of life. She leaves school too soon; she leaves home too soon; she does everything at a rush, and does not do it as well as if she "made haste slowly."

But what a future lies before these charmingly brilliant American girls, if they are able to take the fullest possession of it! The great obstacle in this achievement is the apparently wholesome opinion that education is sufficient. But the very best education will fall short of its privileges if it be not accompanied with that moral training which we call discipline. Discipline is self-denial in all its highest forms; it teaches the excellent mean between license and repression; without it a girl may have plenitude of knowledge, and a lamentable want of sweetness; so that one only second rate on her intellectual side may be a thousand times more lovable than one who is first rate on her intellectual side, but lacks that fine flavor of character which comes from the expansion of noble inward forces, disciplined and directed to good ends.

Every one understands that no character, however intellectual, is worth anything that is not morally healthy; but morality in a woman is not in itself sufficient. She must have in addition all those charming virtues included in that word of many lights and shades and subtle meanings – womanliness; that word which signifies such a variety of things, but never anything but what is sweet and tender and gracious and beautiful.

Dangerous Letter-Writing

Young women are proverbially fond of playing with edged tools, and of all such dangerous playthings a habit of promiscuous, careless letter-writing is the worst; for in most cases the danger is not obvious at the time, and the writer may even have forgotten her imprudence when she has to meet the consequences. The romance, the gush, the having nothing particular to do, the almost insane egotism which makes some young women long to exploit their own hearts, caused poor Madaline Smith to write those foolish letters to a man whose every good quality she had to invent, and who afterwards tortured her with these very letters into a crime which made her stand for months within the shadow of the gallows. She had not patience to await until the real lover came, and then when he did come these fatal letters stood between her and her happiness, and her fair name.

The very instinct which leads to constant letter-writing, goes with a constitutional want of caution, and therefore indicates a necessity for intelligent self-restraint. If young women, when writing letters, would only project themselves into the future and imagine a time when they might be confronted with the lines which they have just penned, many an ill-advised missive would go into the fire instead of into the mail bag. Indeed, if letters at all doubtful in spirit or intent were laid aside until “next morning”

many a wrong would be left undone, many a friendship would be preserved unbroken, and many an imprudence be postponed and so uncommitted. If indeed a woman could say truthfully, "This letter is my letter, and if mischief comes of it I alone have the penalty to pay," expansive correspondence might be less dangerous. But no one can thus limit folly or sin, and its consequence may even touch those who were not even aware of the writing of the letter.

The abuse of letter-writing is one of the greatest trials of the epoch. Distance, which used to be a protection, is now done away with. Every one cries out, and insists upon your listening. They write events while they are only happening. People unknown intrude upon your time and take possession of it. Enmities and friendships thousands of miles away scold or caress; one is exacting, another angry, a third lays upon your conscience obligations which he has invented. For a mere nothing – a yes, or a no – idle, gushing people fire off continual notes and insist upon answers. Now this kind of letter-writing exists only because postage is cheap; if such correspondents had to pay twenty-five cents for giving their opinions, they would not give them at all. It is an impertinence also, for though we may like persons well enough to receive from them a visit, or even to return it, it is a very different thing to be called upon to retire ourselves with pen and ink and note paper, and give away time and interest which we are not inclined to give.

Plenty of girls write very clever letters, – letters that are an

echo of their own circle, full of a sweet audacity and an innocent swagger of knowledge of the world and of the human heart that is very engaging. And the temptation to write such letters is very great, especially as both the writer and her friends are apt to imagine them evidence of a large amount of genius. Indeed, some who have a specially bright pen, or else a specially large circle of admirers and flatterers, arrive speedily at the conviction that they can just as easily write a book. So without reason and without results, they get themselves heart-burning and heart-ache and disappointment. For there is absolutely no kindred whatever between this graceful, piquant eloquence *du billet* and the fancy, observation, and experience necessary to successful novel writing.

If a girl really has a vein of true sentiment, she ought not at this day to give it away in letter-writing. There is a safer and more profitable way to use it; she can now take it to market and sell it for pudding, for the magazines and ladies' newspapers. Sentiment and fancy have a commercial value; and instead of sealing them up in a two-cent envelope for an acquaintance, – who is likely very unappreciative, and who perhaps tosses them into the fire with a contemptuous adjective, – she might send them to some long-suffering editor. These men know the depths of the girlish heart in this respect, and they have a patience in searching for the gold among the dross that is not generally believed in. Therefore, if a girl must write, let her send her emotions to the newspapers; an editor is a far more prudent confidant than her very dearest

friend.

Really, the day for letter-writing is past. As an art it is dead, as convenience it remains; but it has lost all sentiment. Even Madame de Sévigné could not be charming on a postal card, and for genuine information the general idea is to put it into twenty words and send it by telegraph. So, then, it is a good thing for young women to get over, as soon as possible, the tendency of their years to sentimental letter-writing. They will thus save themselves many a heart-ache in the present and many a fear for the future. For if they do not write letters they cannot feel hurt because they are not answered. They cannot worry because they have said something imprudent. They will not make promises, in the exaltation of composition, which they will either break or hate to keep when they are in their sober senses. They will also preserve their friendships longer, for they will not deprive them altogether of that charm which leaves something to the imagination.

Of course there are yet such things as absolutely necessary letters; and these, in their way, ought to be made as perfect as possible. Fortunately, perfection in this respect is easily attainable, its essentials being evident to all as soon as they are stated. First, a letter which demands or deserves the attention of an answer, ought to have it as promptly as if we were paying a bill. Second, we ought to write distinctly, for bad handwriting represents a very dogged, self-asserting temper, – one, too, which is unfair, because if we put forward our criticisms and

angularities in a personal meeting, they can be returned in kind, but to send a letter that is almost unintelligible admits of no reprisal but an answer in some equally provoking scrawl. Even if the writing is only careless, and may be read with a little trouble, we have no right to impose that extra trouble. Third, it is a good thing to write short letters. The cases in which people have written long letters, and not been sorry for having done so, are doubtless very rare. No one will ever be worse for just saying plainly what she has to say and then signing her name to it plainly and in full. For a name half signed is not only a vulgarity, it indicates a character unfinished, uncertain, and hesitating.

There is a kind of correspondence which is a special development of our special civilization, and which it is to be hoped will be carefully avoided by the young woman of the future, – that is, the writing of letters begging autographs. A woman who does this thing has a passion which she ought immediately to arrest and compel to give an account of itself.

If she did so, she would quickly discover that it is a mean passion, masquerading in a character it has no right to, and no sympathy with. An autograph beggar is a natural development, though not a very creditable one. She doubtless began her career of accumulation with collecting birds' eggs in the country, where they could be got for nothing. Butterflies were probably her next ambition. Then perhaps that mysterious craze for postage stamps followed. After such a training, the mania for autographs would come as a matter of course. And the sole and whole motive of

the collecting business is nothing at all but the vulgar love of possessing, and especially of possessing what costs nothing.

It is amusing and provoking to notice the air of complaisance with which some of these begging epistles are suffused. The writers seem incapable of conceiving statesmen, artists, and authors who will not be as pleased to give as they are to ask. But in reality, a man or a woman, however distinguished, who feels a request for his or her autograph to be a compliment, is soaked in self-conceit, and the large majority certainly do look upon such requests as simply impertinent begging letters. The request, indeed, carries an affront with it, no matter how civilly it may be worded, as it is not that particular autograph that is wanted, for the beggars generally prefix as an excuse the bare-faced fact that they have already begged hundreds. Certainly no self-respecting woman will care to put herself among the host of these contemptible seekers after a scrap of paper.

Speaking broadly, a woman's character may be in many respects fairly gauged by her habits on the subject of letter-writing; as fairly, indeed, as we may gauge a man's by his methods of dealing with money. If we know how a man gets money, how he spends it, how he lends it, borrows it, or saves it, we have a perfect measurement for his temper and capabilities. And if we know how a woman deals with her letters, how many she gets, how many she sends, how long or how short they are, if they are sprawly and untidy, or neat and cleanly, and how they are signed and sealed, then we can judge her nature very fairly, for she has

written herself down in an open book, and all who wish may read her.

Flirts and Flirtation

Flirting is the product of a highly civilized state of society. People in savage, or even illiterate life have no conception of its delicate and indefinable diplomacy. A savage sees a woman "that pleases him well," pays the necessary price for her, and is done with the affair. Jane in the kitchen and John in the field look and love, tell each other the reason why, and get married. "Keeping company," which is their nearest approach to flirtation, has a definite and well-understood end in view, the approaches to which are unequivocal and admit of no other translation.

Flirts are of many kinds. There is the quiet, "still-water" flirt, who leads her captives by tender little sighs and pretty, humble, beseeching ways; who hangs on every word a man says, asks his advice, his advice only, because it is so much better than any one else's. That is her form of the art, and a very effective one it is.

Again, the flirt is demonstrative and daring. She tempts, dazzles, tantalizes her victims by the very boldness with which she approaches that narrow but deep Rubicon dividing flirting from indiscretion. But she seldom crosses it; up to a certain point she advances without hesitation, but at once there is a dead halt, and the flirtee finds that he has been taken a fool's journey.

There are sentimental flirts, sly little pusses, full of sweet confidences and small secrets, and who delight in asking the most suggestive and seductive questions. "Does Willy really believe in

love marriages?" or, "Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?" etc.

Intellectual flirts hover about young poets and writers, or haunt studios and libraries, and doubtless are delightfully distracting to the young ideas shooting in those places.

Everybody knows a variety of the religious flirt, – those demure lilies of the ecclesiastical garden, that grow in the pleasant paths where pious young rectors and eligible saints walk. Perhaps, as their form of flirting takes the shape of votive offerings, district visiting, and choir singing, their perpetual gush of sentiment and hero-worship is advantageous, on the principle that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good.

All of these female varieties have their counterparts among male flirts, and besides, there are some masculine types flagrantly and universally common. Such is the bold, handsome bird of prey, who advances just far enough to raise expectation and then suddenly retires. Or the men who are always *insinuating*, but who never make an honest declaration; who raise vague hopes with admirable skill and poetic backgrounds, and keep women madly and hopefully in love with them by looks and gestures they never give an interpretation to. When they are tired they retire slowly, without quarrel, without explanation; they simply allow their implied promises to die of neglect.

Then there is the prudent flirt, who trifles only with married women; dangles after those subtle, handsome creatures who affect blighted lives and uncomfortable husbands, and who,

having married for convenience, are flirting for love. Such women are safe entertainment for the cowardly male flirt, who fears a flirtation that leads perchance to matrimony, but who has no fears about his liability to commit bigamy. There are "fatherly" male flirts, and "brotherly" and "friendly" flirts, but the title is nothing but an agreed-upon centre of operations.

Yet it is difficult to imagine how, in a polished state of society, flirting could be done without. Some sort of preliminary examination into tastes, disposition, and acquirements is necessary before matrimony, and a woman cannot carry a list of her desirable qualities, nor a man advertise his temper and his income. The trouble is that no definite line can be drawn, no scale of moral values can decide where flirting ends and serious attentions begin; and society never agrees as to what is innocent and what reprehensible.

There are ill-natured people who call every bright, merry girl that is a favorite with gentlemen, that talks, sings, and dances well, a "terrible flirt;" who admit nothing as propriety but what is conventionally correct and insipid. The media of flirting are indeed endless; a clever woman can find in simply *listening* a method of conveying the most delicate flattery and covert admiration. Indeed, flirting in its highest quality is an art requiring the greatest amount of tact and skill, and women who would flirt and be blameless, no matter how vast their materials, must follow Opie's plan and "mix them with brains."

It used to be a maxim that no gentleman could be refused by

a lady, because he would never presume beyond the line of her encouragement; therefore it is to be presumed, on this rule, no lady advances further than she is willing to ratify. But such a state of society would be very stupid and formal, and we should miss a very piquant flavor in life, which even very good and great people have not been able to resist.

Upon this rule we must convict Queen Elizabeth as an arrant flirt, and "no lady;" we should be compelled to shake our heads at the fair Thrale and the great Dr. Johnson, at naughty Horace Walpole and Mrs. Hannah More, and to even look with suspicion on George Whitefield and "good Lady Huntingdon."

No, in polished society flirting in a moderate form is an amusement, and an investigation so eminently suited to the present condition of the sexes that a much better one could be better spared. In one case only does it admit of no extenuating circumstances, – that of the married flirt of both sexes.

A flirt may not indeed be an altogether lovely character, even with all her alluring faults; but she is something a great deal nicer than a prude. All men prefer a woman who trusts them, or gayly challenges them to a combat, in which she proposes their capture, to her who affects horror at masculine tastes and ways, and is always expecting them to do some improper, or say some dreadful, thing. Depend upon it, if all the flirts were turned into prudes, society would have gone further to fare worse.

On Falling in Love

"Something there is moves me to love; and I
Do know I love, but know not how, or why."

There is in love no "wherefore;" and we scarcely expect it. The working-world around must indeed give us an account of their actions, but lovers are not worth much in the way of rendering a reason; for half the charm of love-making lies in the defiance of everything that is reasonable, in asserting the incredible, and in believing the impossible. And surely we may afford ourselves this little bit of glamour in an age judging everything by the unconditional and the positive; we may make little escapades into love-land, when all the old wonder-lands, from the equator to the pole, are being mapped out, and dotted over with railway depots, and ports of entry.

Falling in love is an eminently impractical piece of business, and yet Nature – who is no blunderer – generally introduces the boy and girl into active adult life by this very door. In the depths of this delicious foolishness the boyish heart grows to the measure of manhood; bats and boats and "fellows" are forever deposed, and lovely woman reigns in their stead. To boys, first love is, perhaps, more of an event than to girls, for the latter have become familiar with the routine of love-making long before

they are seriously in love. They sing about it in connection with flowers and angels and the moon; they read Moore and Tennyson; they have perhaps been the confidants of elder sisters. They are waiting for their lover, and even inclined to be critical; but the first love of a boy is generally a surprise – he is taken unawares, and surrenders at discretion.

Perhaps it is a good stimulant to faith in general, that in the very outset of it we should believe in such an unreasonable and wonderful thing as first love. Tertullian held some portions of his faith simply "because they were impossible." It is no bad thing for a man to begin life with a grand passion, – to imagine that no one ever loved before him, and that no one who comes after him will ever love to the same degree that he does.

This absolute passion, however, is not nearly so common as it might well be; and Rochefoucauld was not far wrong when he compared it to the ghosts that every one talks about, but very few see. It generally arises out of extreme conditions of circumstances or feelings; its food is contradiction and despair. It is doubtful if Romeo and Juliet would have cared much for each other if the Montagues and Capulets had been friends and allies, and the marriage of their children a necessary State arrangement; and Byron is supported by all reasonable evidence when he doubtfully inquires:

> "If Laura, think you, had been Petrarch's wife,
> Would he have written sonnets all his life?"

This excessive passion does not thrive well either in a high state of civilization. "King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid" is the ballad of an age when love really "ruled the court, the camp, the grove." The nineteenth century is not such an age. At the very best, King Cophetua would now do pretty much as the judge did with regard to Maud Muller. Still no one durst say that even in such a case it was not better to have loved and relinquished than never to have loved at all.

> "Better for all that some sweet hope lies
> Deeply buried from human eyes."

How can love be the be-all and the end-all of life with us, when steam-looms and litigation, railway shares and big bonanzas, cotton and corn, literature and art, politics and dry goods, and a thousand other interests share our affections and attentions? It is impossible that our life should be the mere machinery of a love plot; it is rather a drama in which love is simply one of the *dramatis personæ*.

This fact is well understood, even if not acknowledged in words; the sighs and the fevers, the hoarding of flowers and gloves, the broken hearts and shattered lives, all for the sake of one sweet face, still exist in literature, but not much in life. Lovers of to-day are more given to considering how to make housekeeping as easy as matrimony than to writing sonnets to their mistresses' eyebrows. The very devotion of ancient times

would now be tedious, its long protestations a bore, and we lovers of the nineteenth century would be very apt to yawn in the very face of a sixteenth-century Cupid. Let the modern lover try one of Amadis' long speeches to his lady, and she would likely answer, "Don't be tiresome, Jack; let us go to Thomas' and hear the music and eat an ice-cream."

Is love, then, in a state of decay? By no means – it has merely accommodated itself to the spirit of the age; and this spirit demands that the lives of men shall be more affected by Hymen than by Cupid. Lovers interest society now solely as possible husbands and wives, fathers and mothers of the republic. Lord Lytton points out this fact as forcibly exemplified in our national dramas. Every one feels the love scenes in a play, the sentimental dialogues of the lovers, fatiguing; but a matrimonial quarrel excites the whole audience, and it sheds its pleasantest tears over their reconciliation. For few persons in any audience ever have made, or ever will make, love as poets do; but the majority have had, or will have, quarrels and reconciliations with their wives.

"Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them – but not for love;" and if this was true of Shakespeare's times, it is doubly so of ours. If there ever was any merit in dying for love, we fail to see it; occasionally a man will wildly admit that he is making a fool of himself for this or that woman, but though we may pity him, we don't respect him for such a course. Women, still more rarely than men, "make fools of themselves"

on this score; and in spite of all poets assert to the contrary, they are eminently reasonable, and their affections bear transplanting.

In other respects we quite ignore the inflation of old love terms. "Our fate," "our destiny," etc., resolve themselves into the simplest and most natural of events; a chat on a rainy afternoon, a walk home in the moonlight, mere contiguity for a season, are the agents which often decide our love affairs. And yet, below all this, lies that inexplicable something which seems to place this bit of our lives beyond our wisest thoughts. We can't fall in love to order, and all our reasoning on the subject resolves itself into a conviction that under certain inexplicable conditions, "it is possible for anybody to fall in love with anybody else."

Perhaps this is a part of what Artemus Ward calls the "cussedness" of things in general; but at any rate we must admit that if "like attracts like," it attracts unlike too. The scholar marries the foolish beauty; the beauty marries an ugly man, and admires him. Poverty intensifies itself by marrying poverty; plenty grows plethoric by marrying wealth. But how far love is to blame for these strange attractions, who can tell? Probably a great deal that passes for love is only reflected self-love, the passion to acquire what is generally admired or desired. Thus beautiful women are often married as the most decorous way of gratifying male vanity. A pleasant anecdote, as the Scotch say, *anent* this view, is told of the Duc de Guise, who after a long courtship prevailed on a celebrated beauty to grant him her hand. The lady observing him very restless, asked what ailed him. "Ah,

madame," answered the lover, "I ought to have been off long ago to communicate my good fortune to all my friends."

But the motives and influences that go to make up so highly complex an emotion as love are beyond even indication, though the subject has been a tempting one to most philosophical writers. Even Comte descends from the positive and unconditional to deify the charmingly erratic feminine principle; Michelet, after forty volumes of history, rests and restores himself by penning a book on love; the pale, religious Pascal, terrified at the vastness of his own questions, comforts himself by an analysis of the same passion; and Herbert Spencer has gone *con amore* into the same subject. But love laughs at philosophy, and delights in making fools of the wise for its sake.

It is easy to construct a theory, but the first touch of a white hand may demolish it; easy to make resolutions, but the first glance of a pair of bright eyes may send them packing. It is easy for men to be philosophers, when they are not lovers; but when once they fall in love there is no distinction then between the fool and the wise man. However, we can be thankful that love no longer demands such outward and visible tokens of slavery as she used to. In this day lovers address their mistresses as women – not goddesses. Indeed we should say now of men who serve women on their knees, "*When they get up, they go away*."

Engaged To Be Married

"Woo'd and married and a'.
Woo'd and married and a':
An' is na she very weel aff
That is woo'd and married and a'?"

It is a beautiful fancy that marriages are ordained in heaven; it is a practical fact that they are made on earth; and that what we call "our destiny," or "our fate," is generally the result of favorable opportunities, sympathetic circumstances, or even pleasant contiguity for a season. Hence we always expect after the summer vacation to hear of a number of "engagements." The news is perennially interesting; we may have seen the parties a thousand times, but their first appearance in their new character excites all our curiosity.

Generally the woman expands and beautifies, rises with the occasion, and puts on new beauty with the confidence of an augmenting wardrobe and an assured position. There is nothing ridiculous in her attitude; her wedding trousseau and marriage presents keep her in a delightful state of triumphant satisfaction, and if she has "done well unto herself," she feels entitled to the gratitude of her family and the envy of all her female acquaintance.

The case is not so socially pleasant for her accomplice; it is always an awkward thing for a man to announce his engagement. His married friends ask him prosaic questions, and "wish him joy," – a compliment which of itself implies a doubt; or they tell him he is going to do a wise thing, and treat him in the interval as if he was naturally in a state of semi-lunacy. His bachelor friends receive the news either with a fit of laughter, an expressive, long-drawn whistle, or at best with the assurance that they "consider marriage a good thing, though they are not able to carry out their principles." But he is soon aware that they regard him virtually as a deserter; they make parties without including him; he drops out of their consultations; he has lost his caste among the order of young men, and has not been admitted among the husbands of the community; he hangs between two states; is not of *that*, nor yet quite of *this*.

Naturally enough, there are a variety of opinions on the subject of prolonging or cutting as short as possible this preliminary stage. Those who regard marriage as a kind of commerce, whose clearing house is St. Thomas's or St. Bartholomew's, will, of course, prefer to clinch the contemplated arrangement as soon as possible. Their business is intelligible; there is "no nonsense about them;" and, upon the whole, the sooner they get to ordering dinner and paying taxes the better. Many of us have sat waiting in a dentist's room with a tooth-ache similar to that which made Burns and some of us have watched for an editor's decision with feelings which would gladly have annihilated the interval.

"Cast the wee stools owre the meikle;"

But it is not alone the prosaic and the impatient who are averse to a long engagement: the methodical, whose arrangements it tumbles upside down; the busy, whose time it appropriates; the selfish, who are compelled during it to make continual small sacrifices; the shy, who feel as if all the other relations of life had retired into the background in order to exhibit them as "engaged men;" the greedy, who look upon the expected love-offerings as so much tribute money, – these and many other varieties of lovers would gladly simplify matrimony by reducing its preliminaries to a question and a ceremony. Yet if Love is to have anything like the place in life that it has in poetry; if we really believe that marriage ought to be founded on sympathy of tastes and principles; if we have any faith in that mighty ruler of hearts and lives, a genuine love affair, – we shall not wish to dim the glory of marriage by denying it this sojourn in a veritable enchanted land; for in its atmosphere many fine feelings blossom that never would have birth at all if the niceties of courtship were superseded by the levelling rapidity of marriage. If people are *really* in love they gain more than they lose by a reasonable delay. There is time for the reading and writing of love-letters, one of the sweetest experiences of life; the tongue and pen get familiar with affectionate and noble sentiments; indeed I doubt if there is any finer school for married life than a full course of love-letters. But if the marriage follow immediately on the engagement, all love-letters and all love-making must necessarily have a flavor

of furniture and dress, and of "considerations." I admit that love-making is an unreasonable and impractical piece of business; but in this lies all its charm. It delights in asserting the incredible and believing the impossible. But, after all, it is in the depths of this delicious foolishness that the heart attains its noblest growth. Life may have many grander hopes and calmer joys in store, —

> "But there's nothing half so sweet in life
> As Love's young dream."

Therefore we ought to look with complaisance, if not with approbation, on young people serenely passing through this phase of their existence; but the fact is, we are apt to regard it as a little trial. Lovers are so happy and self-satisfied that they do not understand why everybody else is not in the same supreme condition. If the house is ever so small, they expect a clear room to themselves.

Yet such an engagement, of reasonable length, is to be advised wherever young people are tender and constant in nature, and really in love with each other. I would only ask them to be as little demonstrative in public as possible, and to carry their happiness meekly, for, in any case, they will make large demands on the love, patience, and toleration of their friends. But perhaps one of the greatest advantages of a prolonged engagement is the security it brings against a *mésalliance*. Now, to a man a *mésalliance* is the heaviest weight he can carry through life; but to a woman it

is simply destruction.

The best women have an instinctive wish to marry a man superior to themselves in some way or other; for their honor is in their husbands, and their status in society is determined by his. A woman who, for a passing fancy, marries a man in any way her inferior wrongs herself, her family, and her whole life; for the "grossness of his nature" will most probably drag her to his level. Now and then a woman of great force of character may lift her husband upward, but she accepts such a labor at the peril of her own higher life. Should she find it equally impossible to lift him to her level or to sink to his, what remains? Life-long regrets, bitter shame and self-reproach, or a forcible setting of herself free. But the latter, like all severe remedies, carries desperation instead of hope, with it. Never can she quite regain her maiden place; an *aura* of a doubtful kind fetters and influences her in every effort or relation of her future life.

In the early glamour of a love affair, women do not see these things, but fathers and mothers do; they know that "the world is *not* well lost for love," and they have a right to protest against such folly. In an imprudent love affair, every day is so much gained; therefore when this foolishness is bound up in the heart of a youth or a maiden, the best of all plans is to arrange for time, – as long an engagement as possible.

But I will suppose that all my unmarried readers have found proper mates who will stand the test of parental wisdom and a fairly long and exacting engagement, and that after some

happy months they will not only be "woo'd," but "married and a'." Now begins their real life, and for the woman the first step is *renunciation*. She must give up with a good grace the exaggeration and romance of love-making, and accept in its place that far better tenderness which is the repose of passion, and which springs from the tranquil depths of a man's best nature.

The warmest-hearted and most unselfish women soon learn to accept quiet trust and the loyalty of a loving life as the calmest and happiest condition of marriage; and the men who are sensible enough to rely on the good sense of such wives sail round the gushing adorers, both for true affection and comfortable tranquillity.

Just let a young wife remember that her husband necessarily is under a certain amount of bondage all day; that his interests compel him to look pleasant under all circumstances to offend none, to say no hasty word, and she will see that when he reaches his own fireside he wants most of all to have this strain removed to be at ease; but this he cannot be if he is continually afraid of wounding his wife's sensibilities by forgetting some outward and visible token of his affection for her. Besides, she pays him but a poor compliment in refusing to believe what he does not continually assert; and by fretting for what it is unreasonable to desire she deeply wrongs herself, for —

> "A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
> Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty."

Shall our Daughters have Dowries?

Those who occupy themselves reading that writing on the wall which we call "signs of the times" may ponder awhile the question which Mr. Messinger puts with such plaintive appeal to the parents of this generation: "Shall our daughters have dowries?" But in the very commencement of his argument he abandons the case he has voluntarily taken up, and enters a plea, not for the daughters, but for the young men who may wish to marry the daughters. Also in urging upon parents the duty of endowing their daughters he seems to have lost sight of the fact that "dowry," in its very spirit and intention, does not propose to care for the husband, but is solely in the interest of the wife.

He asserts, doubtless with accuracy, that the average income of young men is $1,100 a year, and he finds in this fact a sufficient reason for the decrease of marriage among them. It is no reason at all; for a large and sensible proportion of young men do marry and live happily and respectably on $1,100 a year, and those who cannot do so are very clearly portrayed by Mr. Messinger, and very little respected by any sensible young woman.

But it is not to be believed that they form any preponderating or influential part of that army of young men who are the to-morrow of our great republic. Let any reader count, from such young men as are known to him, the number who would divide

their $1,100 as Mr. Messinger supposes them to do: —

Dress for self and wife	$600
Apartments	400
Amusements	100

I venture to say the proportion would be very small indeed.

For the majority of young men know that nothing worth having is lost in the sharing. They meet in their own circle some modest, home-making girl whom they love so truly that they can tell her exactly what their income is, and then they find out that their own ideas of economy were crude and extravagant compared with the wondrous ways and means which reveal themselves to a loving woman's comprehension of the subject. The Oranges, Rutherford, and every suburb of New York are full of pretty little homes supported without worry, and with infinite happiness, upon $1,100 a year, and perhaps, indeed, upon less money.

The difficulty with the class of young men whose case Mr. Messinger pleads is one deserving of no sympathy. It is a difficulty evoked by vanity and self-conceit, of which Fashion and Mrs. Grundy are the bugbears. Why should a young man capable of making only $1,100 a year expect to marry a girl whose parents are rich enough to guard her "from every wind of heaven, lest it visit her face too roughly"? "Is it fair treatment of the expected husband," Mr. Messinger asks, that a girl "should

be habituated to live without work and then be handed over to her husband with nothing but her clothing and bric-à-brac?" Yes, it is quite fair treatment. If the husband with his $1,100 a year elects to marry a girl not habituated to work, he does it of his own choice: the father of the girl is probably not at all desirous of his alliance; then why should the father deprive himself of the results of his own labor and economy to undo the folly and vanity of the young man's selection? As for the girl, if she has deliberately preferred her lover to her father, mother, home, and to all the advantages of wealth, she has the desire of her heart. It may be quite fair that she should have this desire, but it may be very unfair that her father, mother, and perhaps her brothers and sisters, should be robbed to make her desire less self-sacrificing to her. For if the young man with his poverty is acceptable to both the daughter and her parents, the latter may be safely trusted to do all that is right in the circumstances.

The most objectionable part of Mr. Messinger's argument is the servile and mercenary aspect in which it places marriage. "What equality can exist," he asks, "where one (the man) supplies all the means of subsistence and performs all the labor?" That a husband should provide the means of subsistence is the very Magna Charta of honorable marriage; and nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand so accept it. It is the precise point on which all true husbands feel the most keenly sensitive. They want no other man – no matter what his relationship or friendship – to support their wives. And under no circumstances

does the husband perform all the labor resulting from a marriage. That he may be a true man, a father and a citizen, it is necessary that he have a home; and in the care of the home, in the bringing-forth and the bringing-up of the family, in the constant demands upon her love and sympathy, the wife performs a never-ceasing multitude of duties that tax her heart and her body in every direction, – a labor of love in comparison with which her husband's daily routine over his "entries" or his "orders" is a trifling drain of vitality. For a wife and mother must keep every faculty and feeling "at attention;" but a clerk over his ledger keeps a dozen faculties on the premises to do the work of one. And in behalf of all true and trusted wives I deny in totality the idea that they go to their husbands with "painful shrinking" for the money necessary to carry on the mutual home, or that there is in any beloved wife's heart the most fleeting thought of "dependence." Mr. Messinger does a great and shameful wrong to the majority of husbands and wives by such an assertion.

Indeed, this gentleman's experience seems to have been an unusually sad one, nine out of ten of his friends having died in early middle age from the undue expenditure of nerve and vital force in their efforts to provide for their families in what they doubtless considered a suitable manner; and he evidently thinks that if their wives had been dowered this result would probably have been averted. It is extremely improbable. The wife's small income would far more likely have led to a still more extravagant way of living; for the genius of the American is to live for to-day

and take care for the morrow when the morrow comes.

In many respects it is the genius of the age. Old forms of thought and action are in a state of transition. No one can tell what to-morrow may bring forth. The social conditions which inspired the fathers of the past to save for their posterity are passing away; and I speak from knowledge when I assert that they were often conditions of domestic misery and wrong, and that growing children suffered much under them. Suppose a father has two daughters and three sons; must he curtail the daughters in the education and pleasures of their youth, must he limit the three boys at home and at college, in order to give a sum of money to some unknown young man who will doubtless vow that his daughter's heart and person are more than all the world to him? If she be not more than all the world to him, he has no right to marry her; and if she be, what can be added to a gift so precious?

The tendency of the time is to dishonor marriage in every way; but the deepest wrong, the most degrading element that can be introduced, is to make it dependent upon dowries or any other financial consideration. We must remember also that in England, where dowry has been a custom, it was one not particularly affecting those classes whose daughters are likely to marry clerks upon small salaries. It was the provision made by landed gentry for their daughters, and they exacted in return an equally suitable settlement from the expectant husband. If the father gave a sum of money to the bride, the bridegroom generally gave the dower-house, with the furniture, silver, linen,

etc., which would make it a proper home for her widowhood. Many a marriage has been broken off because the bridegroom would not make such settlements as the father considered the dower demanded.

Mr. Messinger acknowledges that the cost of living was never so small as at this day, and that the difficulty in the way of young men marrying is "purely one of insane imitation and competition." But there is no necessity for this insane competition; and why provide an unusual and special remedy for what is purely optional? Nobody compels the young husband to live as if his income was $11,000 instead of $1,100. Of his own free will he sacrifices his life to his vanity, and there is no justice in attempting his relief by dowering his perhaps equally guilty wife out of the results of another man's industry and economy.

Dowry is an antiquated provision for daughters, behind the genius of the age, incompatible with the dignity of American men and the intelligence and freedom of American women. Besides, there are very likely to be two, three, four, or more daughters in a house; how could a man of moderate means save for all of them? And what would become of the sons? The father who gives his children a loving, sensible mother, who provides them with a comfortable home, and who educates fully all their special faculties, and teaches them the cunning in their ten fingers, dowers his daughters far better than if he gave them money. He has funded for them a provision that neither a bad husband nor an evil fate can squander. He has done his full duty,

and every good girl will thankfully so accept it.

As for the young men who could imagine themselves spending, out of $1,100, $700 upon dress and amusements, neither the world, nor any sensible woman in it, will be the worse for their celibacy. For if they take a wife, it will doubtless be some would-be stylish, foolish virgin, whose soft hands are of no earthly use except as ring-stands and glove-stretchers. It is such marriages that are failures. It is in such pretentious homes that love and moderate means cannot live happily together. It is in such weak hands that Pandora's box shuts, not on hope, but on despair.

The brave, sensible youth does not fear to face life and all its obligations on $1,100 a year. With love it is enough to begin with. Hope, ambition, industry, good fortune, are his sureties for the future. However well educated he may be, he knows that in his own class he will find lovely women equally well educated. They may be teaching, clerking, sewing, but they are his peers. He has no idea of marrying a young lady accustomed to servants and luxury, and the question of dower never occurs to him. The good girl who supplements his industry by her economy, who cheers him with her sympathy, who shares all his thoughts and feelings, and crowns his life with love and consolation, has all the dowry he wants. And this is an opinion founded on a long life of observation, – an opinion that fire cannot burn out of me.

The Ring Upon the Finger

Rings were probably the first ornaments ever worn, though in the earliest ages they had a meaning far beyond mere adornment. The stories of Judah and Tamar, of Pharaoh and Joseph, of Ahasuerus and Haman, show that as pledges of good faith, as marks of favor, and as tokens of authority, they were the recognized symbols. The fashion was an Eastern one, for the Jews were familiar with it before their sojourn in Egypt; indeed, it may have been one of those primeval customs which Shem, Ham, and Japhet saved from the wreck of an earlier world. Certainly the people of Syria and the lords of Palestine and Tyre used rings in the earliest times; and it is remarkable that they bore the same emblem which ancient Mexican rings bear, – the constellation of Pisces. As an ornament, however, the ring is least important; it is an emblem. The charmed circle has potency and romance.

Great faith in all ages has been placed in charmed rings. Greeks and Romans possessed them, and the Scandinavian nations had a superstitious faith in such amulets; indeed, as chronicles declare, it is hard to compute how much William was indebted for his victory over Harold to the influence of the ring he wore, which had been blessed and hallowed. As curative agencies, rings have also played a curious part. Until the Georgian era, rings blessed by the King or Queen on Good Friday were thought to control epilepsy and other complaints,

and something of this secret power is still acknowledged by the superstitious, who wear around their necks rings or coins that have been blessed. Rings have also been agencies for death, as well as for life. In all ages they have been receptacles for subtle poisons, and thus Hannibal and Demosthenes armed themselves against an extremity of evil fortune.

In the life of the English Queen Elizabeth, rings had an extraordinary importance. She was notified of her ascension to the throne by the presentation of Mary's ring. The withholding of the ring sent by Essex caused her to die in a passion of remorse and re-awakened affection; and no sooner was the great struggle over than her ring was taken from her scarcely cold finger and flung out of the window to Sir John Harrington, who hastened over the Border with it to the Scottish James.

There are some curious traditions regarding the stones usually set in rings. The ruby or carbuncle was thought to guard against illness. The sapphire was the favorite of churchmen, and was thought to inspire pure desires. Epiphanes says the first tables of the Law were written on sapphires. The emerald bestowed cheerfulness and increased wealth. The opal was said to make a man invisible, the jacinth to procure sleep, and the turquoise to appease quarrels between man and wife. Things are much changed, however, since heathen sages and Rosicrucian alchemists defined the qualities and powers of gems. We have commercial "rings" now, which laugh emerald ones to scorn as means of procuring wealth. If the opal could make a man

invisible, it might be popular on the first of a month, but we have better narcotics than the jacinth, while the elaborateness of our women's toilets gives husbands manifold opportunities of peace-making, quite as successful as the turquoise.

The Jews first used it in marriage. For this purpose they required it to have a certain value, and to be finally and fully purchased. If it was bought on credit, or taken as a gift, its power was destroyed. The Christian Church early adopted the custom of the marriage ring. It was placed first on the thumb, in the name of the "Father;" then removed to the first finger, in the name of the "Son;" to the third with the name of the "Holy Ghost;" and the "Amen" fixed its place on the fourth.

Rings were also the emblem of spiritual marriage and dignity as early as the third century. In the Romish Church the Episcopal ring is of gold set with a rich gem. The Pope has two rings, one bearing the likeness of St. Peter, used for ordinary business; the other bearing a cross, and the heads of both Peter and Paul, and the reigning Pope's name and arms. It is used only for Bulls, and is broken at the death of the Pontiff; and a new one given by the city of Rome to his successor. These rings of spiritual office were frequently worn on the thumb, and when the tomb of Bede was opened in May, 1831, a large thumb-ring was found where the right hand had fallen to dust.

The ring has been used not only for carnal and spiritual weddings, but also for commercial ones. For six hundred years the Doges of Venice married, with a gold ring, the Adriatic

and its rich commerce to their city on the sea. As an emblem of delegated or transmitted power, the ring has also played a remarkable part in human affairs. Pharaoh and Ahasuerus in Biblical records are examples. Alexander transferred his kingdom to Perdicas with his ring. When Cæsar received the head of Pompey, he also received his ring, and when Richard the Second resigned his crown to Henry of Lancaster, he did so by giving him his ring. The coronation ring of England is of gold, in which is set a large violet ruby, carved with the cross of St. George. The custom of engraving sacred emblems upon rings for common wear was angrily reproved by so early a sage as Pythagoras; and this heathen's delicacy about sacred things is commended to the notice of those women of our own day, who toss the holy symbol of our faith around the toilet tables, and wear it in very unconsecrated places.

However, I have said enough to prove that the ring upon our finger is a link between us and the centuries beyond the flood. We cannot escape this tremendous solidarity of the human race. We are part of all that has been, and the generations that follow us will look back to us and say, "They were our fathers, and we are their heirs, and lo, we are all one!"

Flirting Wives

If some good and thoughtful woman who died fifty years ago could return to this world, what in our present life would most astonish her? Would it be the wonders of steam, electricity, and science; the tyranny of the working classes, or the autocracy of servants? No! It would be the amazing development of her own sex, – the preaching, lecturing, political women; the women who are doctors and lawyers; who lose and win money on horses, or in stocks and real estate; the women who talk slang, and think it an accomplishment; who imitate men's attire and manners; who do their athletic exercises in public; and, perhaps more astonishing than all, the women who make marriage the cloak for much profitable post-nuptial flirtation.

For her own sex engaged in business, she might find excuses or even admiration; and even for the unfeminine girls of the era, she might plead Mrs. Poyser's opinion, that "the women are made to suit the men." But for young wives notorious for their flirting and their "followers," she could have nothing but unqualified scorn and condemnation. For the sentiment demanding absolute fidelity in a wife may be said to have the force of a human instinct; in all ages it has exacted from her an avoidance of the very appearance of evil. Therefore a good woman in the presence of a frivolous flirting wife feels as if a law of nature were being broken before her eyes; since behind the wife stands the possible

mother, and the claims of family, race, and caste, as well as of conjugal honor, are all in her keeping.

Without any exaggeration it may be said that wife-errantry is now as common as knight-errantry once was. The young men of to-day have discovered the personal advantage and safety there is in the society of another man's wife. They transpose an old proverb, and practically say: "Fools marry, and wise men follow their wives." For, if the husband be only complacent, it is such a safe thing to flirt with a pretty wife. Young girls are dangerous and might lure them into matrimony; but they have no fear of bigamy. They can whisper sweet words to a gay, married flirt; they can walk, and talk, and dance, and ride with her; they can lounge in her dusky drawing-room or in her opera box, and no one will ask them the reason why, or make any suggestion about their "intentions."

How far this custom affects the morals of the woman is not at first obvious; but we must insist on this recognized premise: "Society has laid down positive rules regarding the modesty of women, and apart from these rules it is hard to believe modesty can exist. For all conventional social laws are founded on principles of good morals and good sense; and to violate them without a sufficient reason destroys nicety of feeling, sweetness of mind, and self-respect." It is no excuse to say that propriety is old-maidish, and that men like smart women, or that no harm is intended by their flirtations. The question is: Can married women preserve their delicacy of thought and their nobleness of manner;

can they be truly loyal to their husbands and to themselves throughout the different phases of a recognized flirtation? It is an impossible thing.

Suppose a beautiful girl to be wooed and won by a man in every way suitable to her desires. She has accepted his love and his name, and vowed to cleave to him, and to him only, till death parts them. The wooing has been mainly done in full dress, at balls and operas, or in hours tingling with the expectancy of such conditions. The aroma of roses, the rustle of silks and laces, the notes of music, the taste of bon-bons and sparkling wines, were the atmosphere; and the days and weeks went by to the sense of flying feet in a ballroom, or to enchanted loiterings in greenhouses, and behind palms and flowers on decorated stairways.

The young wife is unwilling to believe that marriage has other and graver duties. She has been taught to live in the present only, and she is, therefore, cynical and apathetic concerning all things but dress and amusements. The husband has to return to business, which has been somewhat neglected; arrears of duty are to be met. He feels it necessary to attend to the question of supplies; he is, likely, a little embarrassed by the long holiday of wooing and honeymooning, and he would be grateful for some retrenchment and retirement, for the purpose of home-making.

The young wife has no such intentions; she resents and contradicts them on every occasion; and after the first pang of disappointment is over, he finds it the most prudent and

comfortable plan to be indifferent to her continued frivolity. He is perhaps even flattered to find her so much admired; perhaps, in his heart, rather thankful to be relieved from the trouble of admiring her. As for any graver thoughts, he concludes that his wife is no worse than A's and B's and C's wives; that she is quite able to take care of herself, and that in a multitude of adorers there is safety.

Thus, in a majority of cases, begins the career of the married flirt. But the character is not a corollary of marriage, if the proper conditions were present when the wife was a young woman. There is no salvation in the Order of Matrimony; no miracles are wrought at the altar of Grace Church, or at St. Thomas's. She that is frivolous, giddy, and selfish is likely to continue frivolous, giddy, and selfish; and marriage merely supplies her with a wider field and greater opportunities for the indulgence of her vanity and greed.

She re-enters society with every advantage of youth, beauty, wealth, and liberty; released from the disabilities under which unmarried girls lie; armed with new powers to dazzle and to conquer. No longer a competitor for a matrimonial prize, she is a rival ten times more dangerous than she was. Setting aside the wrong done to the sacredness of the connubial relation, she now becomes the most subtle enemy to the prospects of all the unmarried girls in her set. What is the bud to the perfect rose? The timid, blushing maiden pales and subsides before the married siren who has the audacity and charm of a conscious

intelligence. It is not without good reason that special balls and parties have come into fashion for social buds; they are the necessary sequence to the predominance of married sirens, with whom in a mixed society no young girl can cope. They have the floor and the partners; they monopolize all the attention, and their pleasure is of the greatest importance. And their pleasure is to flirt – to flirt in all places and at all hours.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.