



Christian Marriage.*

[Printed by Request.]

"THERE WAS A MARRIAGE IN CANA OF GALILEE . . .
AND JESUS WAS CALLED." St. John II. 1, 2.



HAT Jesus should have begun his public ministry, with the manifestation of the Father's glory, in this particular way is most significant. He did not begin like a philosopher by drawing an imaginary picture of some Utopia, nor like a reformer by the reorganization of the Church, but like a son he began with the family.

The old Hebrew tradition, on which Jesus had been nurtured, said that in the beginning God revealed himself to man in a marriage. That when, in the Garden of Eden, He had separated the man from all animal life, showing him that no-

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where there could he find a fit companion, and brought him face to face with the woman, the man said, "She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh—a very part of my personality," and the voice of God answered, "Therefore,"—*therefore* because the only escape from the life of the animal, the true way of realizing your personality, is by the union in love,—“a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.” To which word of God, Jesus with sublime authority, added, “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

This ideal had often been forgotten. It was the first work of Jesus to revive it by going to this humble marriage in Cana of Galilee and manifesting his glory by changing the water of mere natural desire into the wine of supernatural joy.

Our subject is CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE.

Perhaps we could not find a more evident sign of the times than the fact that, I venture to say, on the announcement of this subject your minds have instantly turned to divorce! It is significant. Thirty years ago divorce was hardly ever talked about, and we scarcely knew a case that had occurred amongst respectable people; but to-day it has usurped the center of the stage, it is the problem of the novel, it is the subject of conversation at the dinner party, it is talked over between mother and child, it clamors in the police courts, it demands that legislators change the laws, and it confuses the councils of the Church. It would

seem at times as if marriage had disappeared and that the chief human interest was divorce.

Now this change has come about little by little, until it has reached a proportion that I think you and I, because we are so familiar with it, do not begin to understand. I saw sometime ago a little girl—a dear little child—telling her fortune with cards. It seemed a very delightful fortune, as I listened to it, and looked at her face. She found that she was to marry a prince, live in a splendid castle, have a number of beautiful children, and then she turned over another card and with a merry laugh said, “How funny! then I am going to be divorced.” She had no more thought of evil than an angel in the presence of God, but what a revelation of the moral atmosphere in which that little child had lived, that she should have supposed it possible that such a thing should ever come! She had heard it talked over as one of the probabilities of life. If the nurse were to come into your boudoir and tell you that she suspected germs of tuberculosis in the nursery, what a panic you would be in; but to be told that your children are taking into their systems the germs of hell, what are we to say to that?

Let us ask ourselves what is the cause of this state of affairs. There are a great many causes. It has been said, “Divorce is a symptom, not a disease;” but what I think is forgotten is this, that there are many diseases, the poisonous germs of which are propagated by the symptom. The pustule on the face or the arm is a symptom of smallpox, but it is also the means of spreading

smallpox. Divorce is a symptom of social disease, and also a means of infecting innocent but morally feeble folk.

What are the causes? Well, there are a great many. I shall mention four of them and only on two of them shall I dwell at any length.

(1) The first I believe to be the *higher education of women*. This is one of the greatest blessings that came to us in the 19th century. It has done a vast deal for the improvement of family, Church and State already, and it is destined to do far more. At the same time there is a shadow. Women have come to understand that they are the equals of men. A woman who has been well educated, whose mind has been trained, says to herself (and I think it is almost impossible for any man to understand the feeling of a woman on this subject)—“I have a mind that is open to the highest intellectual pleasures—I have a soul of my own to save. I will not be the toy of any man’s pleasure. I will not be the slave of his whims. If he does not know the difference between a mistress and a wife, I will leave him.”

Or again, women have come to learn that they are the superiors of men. The girl who has been highly educated, who is trained in many tongues, who has read largely and thought about what she read, is married to a man who, she finds after a short time, reads nothing but the newspapers, and in proportion as his mind shrinks, his dogmatism expands, until it is almost impossible for a high-strung, intelligent woman to live with a man of

that sort. And so she says to herself, “I have got my own individual life to consider. I do not intend to be asphyxiated in this atmosphere of intellectual death. I owe to myself, I owe to my child, to go free that I may develop my own personality.”

But in all this talk about personality there is one thing that is forgotten, and that is that the body plays a very important part in the development of it, and that if the body be slighted, sooner or later it takes its revenge in very subtle ways. This woman who found she could not consent to remain in the house of her husband and went forth to be absolutely free, soon finds that another companionship is the one thing lacking for the development of her highest nature, and therefore a divorce, which perhaps might be justified, is followed by a marriage which must be condemned.

I am well aware that in saying these things I lay myself open to the charge of decrying the higher education of women. I do decry it, but only that I may plead for the highest education of women, in which the moral element shall be supreme. When the highest element is the intellectual, the woman thinks her husband is going to read Browning with her in the evening! Well, if she would use her imagination and ask herself what sort of a life this man that she despises is living, how day by day he does his dreary work and never complains, how he is holding on to a position that is altogether uncongenial to him, but which he is afraid to let go for fear she may suffer; how in all the time they have lived together he has never opened his lips

about the dreariness, the misery of the deadly routine that he endures day after day for her sake she might at least pity him. He never tells her that in his efforts to make her happy he has gone to work the wrong way and has spent more money than he can afford. When the bills come in he is shaken with fear, but he never asks her to retrench. He determines either to deny himself or to go into some speculation which will enable him to meet this unexpected call upon his resources. I tell you if some of these highly educated women would simply use their imaginations a little to try and picture what a man's real life is; instead of asking him to read Browning, they would try and interpret Browning's sublime optimism, so that life would be made electric with new courage and joy and hope. The test of my personality is not the amount that I know, it is the amount that I can interpret. And the way to develop that personality, which in the final analysis is self-mastery, is, as Jesus showed, by sacrifice.

(2) Another cause I believe to be the *discovery of anaesthetics and supposedly innoxious narcotics*. I daresay that to some of you this will seem almost fantastic. But let us look at it a moment and see if it be so. When it was found that man could repeat the primeval miracle and cause a deep sleep to fall upon the body out of whose side a new life was to be taken, what hymns of praise went up to God from the lips of women! But now it is so easy to apply the anaesthetic, it is so easy to get drugs to deaden pain, that there has come a decay of

moral fibre until men and women alike have begun to find it impossible to bear pain which is often purely imaginary. The result is that we not only are unwilling to bear physical pain, but we have come to find that anything that is uncomfortable or disagreeable is to be shunned. The care of children, the annoyance that they bring, the limitation of freedom that comes with them, the lessening of income, the anxiety about their future, all those things are tending more and more to be shrunk from, and the result of this deterioration of moral fibre is, that the childless marriage, which was once accounted one of the tragedies of life, is now looked forward to with complacency. I say nothing about the physical effects—that is not my province. I believe that a great duty lies upon the physicians. But I will venture to say this; that any willing or deliberate atrophy of the *spiritual* function of maternity and fatherhood is bound to end in the degradation of the spiritual life; and that it is impossible that mutual respect and love and confidence can exist between a man and a woman in the awful intimacy of marriage, when they know in their hearts that they are failing to fulfill the purpose God had in mind in the creation of man and woman; and the result will be that they will seek divorce because they are disgusted the one with the other. They have returned to the animal life and there is no help meet for the soul in it.

I have dwelt upon these two causes and do not think it is necessary to dwell upon two others: the fierce lust for money and the decay in faith in

the retribution of the Almighty Judge. These things have been spoken of again and again and they will be spoken of many times before we die, therefore I will pass them over and I will ask you to consider what are the remedies to which we may look for a change in this state of affairs.

(1) To begin with the general. We need a revival of asceticism, not the Manichean asceticism of Simeon Stylites, nor the deadening "bodily exercise" of the Monastery, but the asceticism of St. Paul, better translated by "*training*." Men and women need to go into physical, intellectual, and moral training that they may be fit to "run the race that is set before them" and "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Pain is a terrible thing and we naturally shrink from it. But ease can be bought too dear. Sometimes the royal nature is best expressed by a crown of thorns.

(2) In the second place we must look for the remedy in the Home. If you take your little boy out to walk with you and see some poor, drunken wretch in the gutter, you do not lead him near and ask him to look at him and talk to him about drunkenness: least of all do you suggest to him that it is not improbable that he himself may meet that fate some day. You do not tell your little girl everything you know about some of the women you pass in the streets. And the reason you do not do so is because you know that one of the most subtle forces in the education of the young is the power of suggestion, and that to instil into the mind of a little child the dangerous heresy that vice is the normal and virtue the abnormal thing in life,

is to undermine the foundation of that child's character. The hackneyed lines of Pope do enunciate a profound truth:

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs to be but seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

The subject of divorce must be banished from the conversation of reputable people, unless they would have their children grow up under the impression that it is the thing to be contemplated as the not improbable result of marriage.

(3) And the third remedy is to found be with the clergy. Let the clergy make it distinctly understood that, under no circumstances, will they marry a man or a woman who has husband or wife still living, and something will be done to check the evil. I have heard the question raised whether a clergyman has a legal right to refuse to marry a parishioner who comes to him, under the law that the church allows. I should like to see that law tested. I should like to see any Judge or Bishop make a minister marry a man and woman whom he did not believe should be married! And this the clergy can do without entering into any discussion of that somewhat thorny question, "Is the remarriage of a divorced person never to be commended." I do not say that, but this I say, that the service in the prayer book was never intended to be used except for those who have determined that death only should separate from the man or the woman taken at God's altar and who have lived accordingly. It is a mockery to read aloud that solemn service "Until death us do part,"

when a divorced wife or a divorced husband may be right there in the church smiling cynically as they remember years ago when the same words were spoken about them. Let us not pollute the Church of God. If these people have a right to be married, and (mark me) I do not say that they never have, then let them go to the Justice of the Peace. It is a civil contract. Let it be witnessed before one whom the State appoints according to the law, that the State has put forth, but do not let them come into the Church of God and ask the minister to declare that "Those whom God hath joined together no man shall put asunder."*

And for my own part I do not think it should end there. I think if the clergy went further, and made it distinctly understood that they would not be party to a marriage in which, in their judgment, the union was an unfit one, they would save themselves from the scorn of the caricaturist and from the distrust of religious men and women. A man comes here to be married at those steps. I know, everybody knows, that he has rolled in the gutters of this city for the last ten years, and that girl who stands there to be married knows nothing about his life, nor of the life of any other man. Do you suppose that I would stand up there and say, "Those whom God hath joined together?" The marriage service is only to announce the accomplished fact that God has joined those people together. Do you suppose he has joined that

* I hope I may not be thought egotistic if I say that this conviction is not a recent one but expresses my own practice from the beginning of my ministry.

man to that girl, when the whole end and object of the marriage, as everybody knows, is that the girl may get some social position that she has longed for, or that the man may replete his empty coffers,—and where the money went it would be best not to ask? No, let the clergy say, "No fee is large enough, no social *éclat* is great enough to induce us to be a party to this desecration of marriage."

And lastly, let them assert the pastoral office and insist that those who are to be married should come and see them beforehand, that they might have an opportunity to tell them what that solemn service means. "Reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, I take you for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, and to cherish, till death us do part." Do they mean it? If years after they say, "We did not know what that service meant," who is to blame? The minister that allowed them to repeat those words and found time to go to a rehearsal, but no time to have those people face to face with him in the sight of God, to ask them whether or not they were prepared for the married life!

It has been said that our church should not take too much upon herself in this matter. Well, my answer is that our church is in a very peculiar position. There are great numbers of divorced people who have never had the slightest connection with our church, but who eagerly seek her altar for their remarriage because they believe that she will give them a certain sort of social standing. Therefore the church that is in that unenviable

position should see to it that she does not sell the kingdom of God for the mess of society pottage.

(4) But more important than the education of the young, or the public activity of the clergy, is the influence of what is called society. In the early Church excommunication was a great power for good. It fell into abuse and became an instrument of cruelty. It has now fallen into such contempt that to say a man has been excommunicated by the Church is almost equivalent to saying he is an unusually good and wise man. But excommunication has not disappeared, and the power of it has not been lost, though the Church in its divided state is unable to exercise it. It always belonged, not to the officials in the Church, but to Christian people. It belongs there to-day. Now, I do not hesitate to say that there are a score of women in this city who could put a check to this evil of divorce within a year. Let it once be distinctly understood that those much desired cards to balls, receptions, dinners, and "at homes" did not go to men and women who had been divorced and scandalously married again, and I tell you, my friends, that it would be surprising how many people would find that they could live together. For responsibility goes with privilege, and those of you who are recognized as leaders in society have got to give an account to God of your leadership of society, as truly as the minister is to account for his leadership of the congregation. "When thou sawest a thief," said the psalmist, "thou consentedst unto him and hast been partaker with

the adulterers. These things hast thou done and I held my peace. Thou thoughtest wickedly that I am even such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee and set before thee the things which thou hast done. Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I pluck you away and there be none to deliver you." The leadership of society will depart from those who are leading society into animalism.

I can imagine three objections made to this whole unpleasant discourse. The first is, that nothing is said about the legal aspects of the problem, and that this is to-day the burning question in the church. I can not agree. I think canonical action on this subject may do more harm than good. Man can not be legislated into the ideal life. The passing of a canon may seem to imply that the ideal is not already clearly set forth in the marriage service; it may have the effect, that much legislation on temperance has had, of lessening the sense of individual responsibility. No law executes itself though it is a most popular fallacy that it does. It may have the effect of widening the already alarming schism between Church and State. In as far as marriage is a civil contract, let the State regulate it. In as much as it is a part of the ideal life, let the Church endeavor to realize it. This can only be done by what the Bible calls "the outpouring of the Spirit," by what to-day we call "a purified public opinion." That is the dynamic we need, and if we can generate that law will be unnecessary, and, until we do, futile. Secondly, it would appear as if all

the trouble were with women and that men were not at all to blame. That is not true; but this is true, that the large majority of those who seek for divorces are women, and the large majority of those who desire primarily to be remarried are women, and there is a reason for it which does not reflect on the virtue of men. It simply means that men can gratify themselves without scandal and without the heavy penalty women must pay, and that women need some mantle of respectability, and therefore they seek it in what is called a second or third or I know not what number of marriage. Of old, men put away their wives. To-day in the large majority of cases, women seek the divorce and women can put the scandal to an end.

Another objection may be, "That it is all very well to talk about exercising the power of excommunication in society, but you seem to forget that there is scarcely a family which is not touched in one branch or another by this evil. Do you suggest that when we give an entertainment someone in the family shall be omitted because he or she has been divorced and there has been a little talk about it, and been married again? Shall we leave them out?" It is not for me to give you advice as members of society, but I only will remind you that this is the modern form in which the everlasting conflict against the ideal expresses itself. Jesus had in mind the conflict when he said, "I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be those of his own household. He that loveth father

or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." You love someone better than Jesus Christ when you condone the wrongdoing that is corrupting society.

Now our time has gone without one word about Christian marriage, and yet what need to say many words. It is all so simple—a Christian marriage. We need not try to draw an imaginary picture of bliss such as the world has never seen and which the conditions of life on this earth make impossible. No, my friends, it is very simple. It is the life of a man and a woman who have bidden Jesus to come to their wedding and bidden him not once, in some mystic, strange way that has no relation to the understanding or will of man, but who are bidding every day to come to them the same spirit that he bore in his heart that day he walked across the hills from Nazareth to Cana—the spirit of love. The love that will not make itself the first object, as he would not perform a miracle for his own glory. A love that seeks not its own, but another's. A love that seeks to supply what is lacking in the other's life—lacking in the husband's intellectual development, lacking in the wife's moral stability, lacking anywhere in life—let love supply the lack, as Jesus did when they told him there was no wine. A love that goes about the household and the daily life, transmuting the common into the divine. A love that counts no thing so common or unworthy that it will not gild it with the glory of the heavenly love. Ah, best

of all,—best of all for those whom God has given to know it—a love that keeps the best for the last. The passion of youth has died away, the struggles of manhood have worn themselves out; but at the last is given that draught of pure love, where the spirits are mingled in a perfect communion. “Grow old along with me—the best is yet to be,” where each can to the other say, ‘Thou hast kept the good wine until now.’”

