

Marriage

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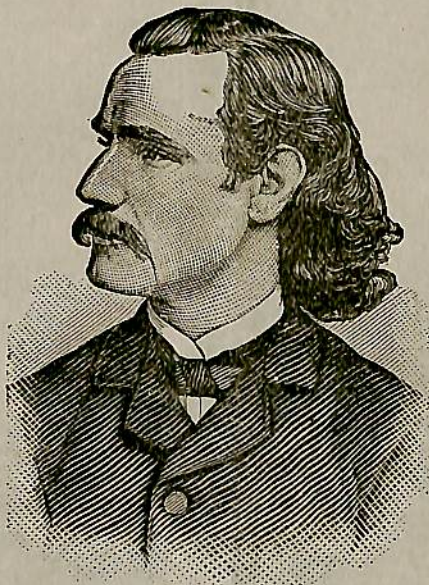
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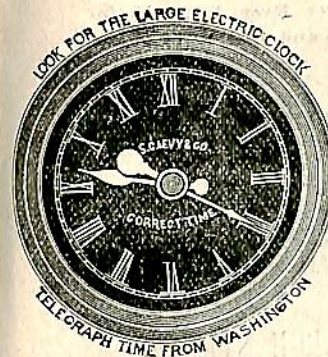
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MARRIAGE.

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MARRIAGE.

Text—Hebrews xiii. 4.

"Marriage is honourable in all."

The happiness of the marriage relation has not only much to do with the comfort of the parties immediately concerned, the children emanating from the union, and the friends on both sides, but is of the utmost consequence to society at large and the general happiness and welfare of the nation. Ill-considered and hastily-repent unions are the cause of nine-tenths of the immoralities and domestic infelicities now so frightfully prevalent, and it is ripe time, as there is ripest reason, that the voices of the ministers of the gospel should be lifted in warning and counsel, lest the patience of the Lord be exhausted, and Divine wrath blot out the wrong.

The State finds its fairest warrant, and bases its firmest hopes of perpetuity, in the happy marriages of its citizens. They are the surest guarantee against discontent, are pledges of interest in the general weal, anchors, enabling the ship of state to ride royally the teasing, choppy sea of politics; and, in fact, without the home, which depends on marriage, States could not be governed. It divides the body politic into small communities, each ruled by a responsible head, for the father of a family exer-

cises in his place as chief of the house an authority as real as that enjoyed by the President of these commonwealths.

The young men may be a nation's hope, but nations do not live on promises to pay; the quiet family man is the real factor in the nation's worth and grandeur. The instinct of the older nations not only led them to encourage marriage, but to ordain severe penalties against such as insisted on celibacy. Sparta excluded bachelors from the dances of the maidens, but made them dance in winter, singing songs of no complimentary tenor to themselves. A bachelor, even of the highest rank and consideration in the State, might be insulted with perfect impunity, as, for instance, when a young man refused to rise in the presence of Dercyllidas, an eminent, though celebrate commander, and replied, when rebuked, "No child of yours will ever rise to honor me." Rome obliged any unmarried person, to whom a legacy had been left, to marry within one hundred days after the testator's death, or else lose half of the bequest. The *Lex Julia et Papia Poppæa*, of date B. C. 18, A. D. 9, settles also that widows must marry within a year, and divorced women six months, or lose half the inheritance. No unmarried man could hold a place of public trust, as his stake in the general weal was not considered sufficiently grave to insure fidelity and steadfastness. Even as late as the reigns of the third William and the third George of Great Britain, laws were enacted bearing somewhat severely on bachelors, and in some parts of Germany they pay a tax at the present time.

This is only the civil side of the question. According to the Scriptures, the marriage of one man to one woman was ordained of God prior to all human laws and ordinances. It was designed to spiritualize the grosser masculine nature, and to keep alive among men a type of God Himself, in that parents are creators, as it were, of communities, governors of commonwealths, provi-

dences to helpless dependents, ruling in love, obeyed from affection, sacrificing themselves ever for the well-being of their families. It was designed also to enable the race to live in peace and happiness, to exalt the higher nature, give definite scope to the affections, to typify the relation of Christ to His church, for the Lord loves to stand in the conjugal relation to His people, and while a happy home is as near as poor mortals may attain to heavenly bliss on earth, the opposite is the nearest stage to hell approachable on this side of the grave.

Marriage in the Lord is of all relations most holy, a pleasant and beneficent state for the contemplation of men and angels. Marriage in the flesh is hailed with joy among the lost and damned, the certificate perused with exultation by the red light of hell, and the homes thus formed looked upon as recruiting offices by the father of the under world. Satan stands best man at such unions, chief of the bridesmaids, the hag of sin, orange blossoms and vows are cursed mockeries, links in the binding chains that eternity cannot rust or wear out. The Christian home is the lovely and delectable nursing-mother of the Church. At her beneficent breasts citizens good and noble are nourished, and saints of God, men glorified, and restored to original innocence and perfection.

A hasty or ill-advised marriage, then, is fraught with evil to both church and State, so that both are interested in the good work of establishing marriage on a pure and stable foundation. The church should advise fathers and mothers, and these in turn their children, for reform, like charity, begins at home. Let us then reason together on this matter with such fair candor as becomes earnest Christians and reasonable persons.

The basis of all true happiness lies in the proper religious education of children. Whoever educates children irreligiously prepares them for misery. It is not always agreeable to children

to attend religious worship, to study Sabbath-school lessons, and learn the Catechism, and yet these are the best means, combined with proper parental instructions, to induce a religious habit of mind. It is easy to form habits, whether for good or evil, but very hard to break them, and experience teaches that, save in a few cases where parents have made religion harsh and unlovely to their little ones, children bred in the Sabbath-school die in the church. Irreligious education may, of course, develop the merely intellectual and reasoning powers, but invariably at the expense of the spiritual organization of man, and yet not to the reason, nor to the intelligence, but to the spiritual organization man must look for those higher pleasures which constitute the only true happiness. Love may be taken as an illustration. It is certainly not of the reason, nor is it the child of that cold, passionless Minerva, the intellect. When the unbeliever loses a friend, a child or wife, may be, he is just as sorrowful, more so, perhaps, than the Christian. The parting is a terrible wrench to the natural affections, but such continue to love. Reason has nothing to do with it; what they call common sense scouts the idea of reunion, and yet they love, because it is the passion of the soul, and, therefore, eternal. Religion is the food of love, love is the mother of happiness, and without that real, faith-fed love, earth is barren of lasting joy. So the proposition is illustrated, that he who educates religiously, trains for happiness, and irreligiously, for pain.

Virtues are the nature of the soul; qualities, the soul's use of physical powers, so that what holds good of love is true of all elements of happiness. Without Christ, joy is a starveling, and peace an uncertain dream. A Christian home is an academy for the instruction of the soul, even as a public school trains the intelligence. The seeds of marital happiness must be sown then early in the natures of boys and girls at home and in the Sab-

bath-school. Nor should the polite training of young persons be neglected. Later on in life a respectful manner may be induced, but the coarse nature will invariably crop out and betray the baser man. Manners are of themselves only a thin veneer, while heart-courtesy becomes second nature. A boy should never be permitted to domineer over his girl playmates, nor they to be fitful and petulant with him. In all matters capable of such an arrangement, the boy should be taught to give up his own fancy in favor of his weaker playmate, except where a principle is involved, and then sex nor condition can have no recognition. I by no means advise this because the girl is the weaker vessel, but because she is the finer, the repository of those spiritual forces which keep the race from irredeemable grossness. He should be taught to regard her as a part of man, as, in fact, the crown, the perfect completion of manhood, and to respect her finer spiritual organization. Teach him that she is neither above nor below him, neither his slave nor his idol, but a living evidence of the love of God, who not only sent His well-beloved Son to die for our sins, and reconcile us to His heart, but these, His daughters, to dwell among us, and aid in retaining those purer and tender sentiments which force us to believe that Christ was indeed no myth, but Very God and Very Friend.

The subject of marriage should not be avoided by parents, though over-discourse upon it might be dangerous. At no time, however, should loose or malicious jokes upon that holy estate be heard in any home. All slighting reference to woman in any book, paper, or public discourse should be spoken of with the sternest reprehension, and marriage, as a spiritual bond, eternal in its consequences, should be held up in life and speech as most honorable, and the only true view to be taken of that state. I have been thus minute in this argument, because I feel necessity

upon me to speak plainly. As a rule, the misery of marriage is brought about by men, though there are, indeed, women of whom Solomon's words are true, "Their steps take hold on hell;" yet I believe that a more candid, more spiritual, and less sentimental intercourse between the sexes would remedy much of the evil. One of the most favorable signs of the times is the co-education of the sexes. If one will take the trouble to observe the behavior of a boy out of a large public institution, like Girard College, or a girl just free from an exclusive and seclusive boarding-school, it will be seen that they are either much too shy or too bold and forward, rarely equal to that easy deportment which is so sure a mark of well-bred persons. View the student of Swarthmore, on the other hand, and it will readily be seen how great advantage is derived from the sensible educational community of the sexes. Very few members of the Society of Friends ever figure in scandals and divorce cases, and the reason for this happy immunity may be traced to the free intercourse enjoyed by the Quaker youth.

Never consider the young company your children may bring to your houses tiresome and annoying, unless you discover vicious and unruly habits in them, but make them perfectly at home, and, as far as your time will permit, aid in providing innocent entertainment for them. By this means you will come to know more of your own and other people's children, and be better able to study their true interests, while the children, restrained from rudeness by your example and presence, will learn to respect and love each other more. Then, as the young people grow older, there lies before the anxious parents a problem of no small importance. If you have a daughter, she naturally desires the company of young gentlemen. Now, the pernicious custom prevails of permitting young people to dissociate themselves absolutely from the family, and to spend whole hours and

those of the night and evening alone together. Can folly possibly go further than this? And where can the shadow of a good reason be found for the continuance of this custom? Who are the best judges of a young man's character, the parents or the daughter whom he visits? You will answer the parents, most certainly! And yet what opportunity is afforded them to judge of the merits of the young man who aspires to be their son-in-law? None whatever. He sees them for a few moments, perhaps, and is polite in jerky, schoolboy fashion, and then for all purposes of criticism is buried for the rest of the evening. This should never be. The reply may be made that the young man is not going to marry the whole family, but the daughter only, and therefore she is the responsible party. Such reasoning is hollow and unsound, and creates much misery. The young man is going to marry the family; the family honor, the family credit, the family peace, the family name. For all these he is responsible to the family, as well as to the lady he addresses, so that you have a right to search him; to try him by critical standards, whether he be tinsel or genuine gold. Make him a member of your home circle, study him when he is unaware of your scrutiny, sift him in intelligent conversation. Would you trust your money in the hands of one of whom you are ignorant? Why, then, should you deliver over your honor, your credit, your peace to one whose character you do not know? If a young man objects to face such criticism, he is unworthy of your daughter, and should be denied your doors. Inquire also into his religious belief, I don't mean his creed, but the religious turn of his mind. Remember, you are not only surrendering your daughter's body into his keeping, but her immortal soul. Is he fit for such a charge? Is he reverent and respectful, when conversation is held on sacred subjects? Beware of that bright young man who takes pleasure in telling you that he is an infidel; who

finds such wondrous truth and wit in Robert Ingersoll's lectures, and so little to his taste in the Word of God. Marriage is above all things a religious state, a union of souls, and souls can only be bound together by holy sentiment and Divine love. Let no wolves enter your fold; carefully sift the character of all who seek your alliance; converse with them freely, for the man's conversation will often betray his heart, even as streams will show in their sand the gold that was once hidden in the mountain. If he have vices with which you are acquainted, do not trust to marriage to eradicate them; it will only make a victim of your child and bring desolation to your heart. Men may promise much, but before you allow your child to marry, let something be performed. The financial condition of a young man is also to be gravely considered. It needs not that he be rich, but it is necessary that he possess such abilities as will enable him to control fortune to some extent. A hint may be taken from Themistocles in this matter. He had a daughter, who was addressed by two men, one an elderly person, with a considerable fortune, but of no character, the other, young and poor, but of excellent mind and ability. Themistocles chose the latter, and, when questioned, said that "he would rather have the man without the money, than the money without the man." Many a poor man is a richer husband than he who possesses great quantity of this world's goods. Daughters should be taught to live in the spirit of the fifth commandment, honoring father and mother with confidence and trustful respect, never letting their own feelings carry them too far. If parents had more to do with such matters, as advisers of their children, fewer unhappy marriages would occur. Be sure, young people, that everything clandestine is wrong. Truth and honor love the light of day; shame and disgrace seek hiding-places. "Let your conversation be yea, yea, nay, nay, for whatsoever is more

than these cometh of evil." Your parents are your nearest and dearest friends; you brave too much if you do not seek their counsel.

Thus far my attention has been turned most particularly to parents and marriageable daughters, but it behooves young men to be equally cautious. "All that glitters is not gold" is a maxim particularly true of matrimonial wares. Multitudes of girls are mere time-murderers, brought up as though eternity itself would be all too short to dawdle in. For such, husbands, fathers and brothers are only purveyors; they claim every right but the right to work, every privilege but the privilege of usefulness, and, in fact, look down upon their busier sisters as traitors to the sex, in that they encourage mankind to believe that women were made for other uses than to be looked at and admired. I know that it is profitless to warn young men of such persons. The eye will, I fear, ever seduce the head, but profitless or not, truth is it, that misery will dwell with him who weds a woman whose beauty is her only excuse for being.

Another difficulty to be overcome is the theatrical and unreal nature of courtship. Such a state of affairs cannot always be kept up; hopes are raised and habits induced entirely incompatible with cool, sober life. We are not gods and goddesses, neither are we saints, but just people, who have to depend largely upon bread and butter for our everyday living. Nectar and ambrosia sound well in poetry, but are of little account in the prose of existence. Approach marriage neither with mock heroics nor wanton levity, but with honest good sense. Love as much as you will, but reason while you love, and pray while you reason. A good husband, a good wife, are God's richest guerdon to the race, and such are not lightly to be gained. Before marriage, critically observe each other's faults, however blind you may be to them afterwards. Discuss them, pray over

them, battle with them, but never allow them to surprise you or take you unawares. Form as high opinions of each other's merits as you possibly can, but leave room always for a margin of natural imperfections, but when married, be dumb; do not reproach each other then with failings you overlooked before, but be jealous of each other's honor, and hide each other's weaknesses. We are here to bear burdens, not to make them. Whoever marries must surrender half his own nature, if he would gain a like interest in the life of her to whom he is wedded, and both would indeed become "one flesh." True marriage can never be one-sided; it gives and it takes, and thus the stream of love is perennially fed. It is great folly for any man to look upon his wife as a sort of life-prisoner, over whom he is a divinely-constituted jailor; that she must submit herself to his whims and fancies, and venture no appeal from his unjust decisions. The celebrate Apostle, whose writings, strangely enough, teem with matrimonial advice, wrote, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord."

Now, the Lord demands no unreasonable thing of those who submit to Him; therefore husbands, if they demand the submission of their wives, must ask nothing that the Lord would not approve, else submission is not "as unto the Lord," but as unto Satan. Neither take to yourselves the duties of domestic chaplain and lecturer to the lady of your choice: neither let the wife so do with her husband, for each is gifted with intelligence, and such behavior may engender dislike and resentment. Live ever in a state of mutual respect; cherish the habit of esteem; when you are happy, let the world behold your joy; when you are miserable, hide it as closely as if it were a deadly sin. Give none cause to discuss your domestic affairs, and above all things, never reproach each other in the presence of company, for that invites outside interference, and may result in endless trouble.

Never publish your little grievances, for while one regrets to speak so of mankind, yet, is it true, that men and women are like children, who will open a drum to see where the sound comes from, and so destroy it, so these would tear to shreds your domestic peace, and leave scarce a fragment worth weeping over. As the writer of a fictitious account of the married life of Albert Durer puts it, "Their peace hovered over them like a scared-away lark, no longer visible among the clouds, till single notes of her song again penetrated down to them, as if the sun were singing and speaking to them." Keep your griefs to yourselves; pray over them; God will bury them. If strangers once enter into the matrimonial holy of holies, sanctity is forever lost.

It is above all things unbecoming to describe to others the failings and imperfections of your wife or husband. You cannot insure secrecy. The devil seems to have chartered the winds and subsidized the birds to carry such tales, and, like the Australian boomerang, they surely return, but with added venom, and enlarged detail, to confront and shame you when you would fain forget and forgive. Try to be pleased with every effort made to insure your comfort; nothing so soon sours persons of each other's company as a continually fault-finding disposition in either of them. This grows to quarreling, that to hatred, and hatred to that terrible bourne from which no traveler returns unscathed, absolute divorce. Become interested in each others pursuits, nor ever consider wife's duties trifling or uninteresting. They are her life; she puts her soul's overwelling love into even the slightest matters. The picture yonder, the tidy on that chair, the pretty pillow on the lounge, the footstool there, the flowers on the mantle, all these things mean love for you and a desire for your comfort, your repose, and the gratification of your taste. Let the wife never annoy her husband in

his business, but if he be a wise man, he will acquaint her with its drift, and inform her of its important details. But while all these things are necessary to felicity, most necessary are those things which keep before the mind the soul's responsibility to God. I know of nothing that will so cement the hearts of young people together as attendance upon Divine worship and a mutual interest in church affairs. To sit together under earnest and consecrated pulpit teaching, to mingle with those whose hopes and desires are beyond and above the world, to dwell perpetually among a people interested in your happiness and spiritual welfare, is to earn a guarantee of happiness seldom vouchsafed to the worldly and irreligious.

Again, I would warn you against incurring quarrels for the mere sake of the reconciliation that may follow. It may be very pleasant at first, but soon the interval between quarrels and reconciliations will grow longer and longer, till absolute estrangement ensues. Do not trifle with your happiness; it is too tender a thing to bear rough usage or unseemly experiments.

And now, to conclude, when we consider marriage in all its bearings, we cannot fail to observe that it has been the most important factor in the universal advancement of mankind. Without it, society would be as chaotic as ever the cosmos before the Divine voice gave it particular vocation. At the root of the fiercest and bloodiest wars, nurses of the direst evils that earth has known, unconsecrated woman has been a curse and shame. Mother of its chastest joys, nurse of its tenderest affections, elder sister of its peace, the consecrated wife has moved along the centuries, and whether through right or wrongs, whether in semi-slavery or the freedom born of higher intelligence, has lifted up her hand, manacled or loose, and with her tears even, has striven to wash the mark of the beast from humanity's broad brow. Marriage has divided the human herd

into home bands and circles, quickened the affections, and produced in society that spirit of confidence of which all industries are born, and through which the arts and amenities thrive. Without marriage and the acknowledged laws that govern it, the weak would be at the mercy of the strong, beauty would become the prey of the robber, and innocence the wallow of the brute, and love would no more root in our common soil than the color of the clouds leave eternal dyes upon the rocks. Man could never have advanced beyond the rudest stage of being. See now in our modern life, how the man of the unhappy home grows cross and querulous, fitful and fault-finding, unable to attend to business, distrustful of friends, quick to make and multiply foes. Then imagine, if you can, so desperate and altogether horrible a matter as a world without a home, a restless, uneasy, savage world, theatre of murders and hatreds, decimated by a very pestilence of savagery, and without marriage this is truly what the world would be. Free love is the quarry from which eager demons cut the stones that make the masonry of hell; conjugal love the place where joyous angels find the shapely marbles wherewith to raise the wondrous mansions wherein the blessed and glorified dwell. The arts owe their very existence to marriage. Are they not the outgrowth of a certain temper of mind lost to earth, alive to the souls and meanings of things. Do they not hold the formative intelligence rapt, and is not rapture an absolute one indeed state of contemplation, only possible to the peaceful mind? Can a mind troubled with earthly matters, jarred on perpetually by domestic discordances, ever attain such a state of fruitfulness? Certainly not! Marriage, and the rest and confidence in its train, the comparative certainty it implies, the mutuality of love and respect it engenders, is certainly the most responsible agent in the artistic life of the world. From it, as from the hands of a most potent and puissant friend, all comforts and luxuries have

come, for is not love a very eager questioner of wants and fancies, and does not love purvey very generously for the needs of its objects? Marriage is the mother of foundations, of cornerstones, of roomy mansions, of all dwellings that are not canvas, all homes that are not tents and wigwams. These latter do not invite comfort, nor call luxury to abide in them. Stability and comfort marriage implies; all else is grievous uncertainty. How much also the religious life of the race depends upon it needs no argument to the intelligent mind. Christ is the Lord of homes, dwelling conjugally among His people.

What, then, do we owe this Christ? what bliss, what comfort, what hope. How great is the gift we have received of the hands of God, sacred as the ark of the covenant, not to be approached by the unconsecrate, "honorable in all," honoring all, bestowing on the world the peace which is next, and akin to that which passeth all understanding.



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
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