

**'THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN
TOGETHER TILL THE LAST', AN
ESSAY ON MARRIAGE, AND THE
POSITION OF WOMEN IN
ENGLAND**

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'They might have been together till the last', an essay on marriage, and the position of women in England by Various

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AN ESSAY ON
MARRIAGE, AND THE POSITION OF
WOMEN IN ENGLAND

LONDON
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1885

“THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN TOGETHER
TILL THE LAST.”

I AM a man, not a woman, that write this; and a man of the world accustomed to meet and do business with men and women of different ranks, including some of the rough and of the criminal classes. And I have accordingly acquired, to at least an average degree, the habit, common to social man, of restraining the feelings from unnecessary, or what would be deemed unseemly, expression. Yet there is one sight which, as often as I see it, almost forces the tears from my eyes. It is no melancholy occasion; rather is it a joyous one, and commonly held to be proper for actual merry-making. It is when a girl for the first time puts her hand upon her husband's arm and leaves the altar where she has been made a wife. She may look happy; she may be proud as well as happy; she may be rightly proud of the man to whom, in the language of the Church,

she has been given; the match may have been in all respects a suitable one. Yet I can hardly forbear to weep for her and her inevitable disappointment.

2. Do not suppose that I think it a mistake for a woman to marry. On the contrary, I think that to marry a man she loves is a woman's highest happiness, as to marry a woman he loves is a man's highest. Do not suppose, either, that I think there is no cause for compassion for the bridegroom also. He will have his disappointment too, but I can hardly think of it when the vision of the other is before me. His may, indeed, in a particular case be the greater, but it does not appeal in the same way to me. And it may safely be said that, as a rule, the woman's disappointment is greater than the man's; and the reason of this is the cruel fact that, in our society, marriage is a greater thing to a woman than it is to a man. In the first place, women are led to think more of the marriage tie, because to be married is a matter of greater moment to them than it is to men. This is wholly unfair and wrong, but it can only indirectly affect the point now in question. What mainly affects it is that, after marriage, men have usually more numerous and more engrossing interests independent of the marriage relation than have women. Though it is not literally true that

“Man's love is of man's life a thing apart :
’Tis woman's whole existence,”

yet the lines do indicate a great present fact. This also I hold to be wholly unfair and wrong. And I am going presently to suggest remedies or a remedy for both these wrongs. But, first, let me explain the nature and immediate causes of that disappointment with one another which I affirm that all married persons, sooner or later, and to a greater or lesser degree, find. Then I will consider what are the proper preventives of that disappointment; and the remedy that I shall propose will be found to require for its effect the remedy also of the wrongs indicated above.

3. It is not necessary in this part of the subject to consider marriages which have been made on any unworthy motive on either side; nor to consider cases in which either of the two parties is so base or cruel, so faithless or so utterly selfish, that if the character had been at all truly discerned the other party would have never consented to the match. We are now only concerned with cases in which the man and woman have married because they loved one another, and have begun their joint life with full intentions of acting fairly towards one another.

4. But is it necessary, first, to establish the proposition that some measure of disappointment usually, if not always, follows matrimony, even when the bond is undertaken in a proper spirit upon both sides? Mark distinctly that I do not mean disappointment

amounting to regret that the tie was ever made. Such a miserable conclusion of genuine love I believe to be rare indeed. But the disappointment I mean consists in the perception that the balance of pleasing and unpleasing qualities in the partner is not so favourable as it appeared before marriage, and in the feeling that the joy of constant society is not in accordance with the promise of earlier acquaintance.

5. I must digress a little here to anticipate the objection that love is a sort of madness, that young persons who fall in love with one another entertain most unreasonable notions of the merits of one another, and Lord Bacon may be quoted to the effect that there was never proud man thought so absurdly well of himself as the lover does of the person loved. I admit the force of this. Persons of enthusiastic temperament will in all provinces, but especially in that of love, form high ideals, the corresponding actualities of which they will never find. It is part of our education to see our ideals broken, as it is part of our nobility still to idealize. I allow that there is no remedy for this, and I make exception for it. But there remains a balance of disappointment which, as far as I can see, is without redeeming advantages and which is remediable. I affirm that the reasonable expectations of happiness formed by sober-minded persons are not fulfilled as they might be.

6. But while making allowance for the natural dis-

appointment of extravagant anticipation and the strange madness of early love, it is to be remembered that there are, on the other hand, certain sets-off against this. For the perfected intimacy which marriage brings gives to the lovers a new source of sympathy unknown before; and the birth of children gives them yet another. These two influences, the one universal and the other usual, are new additions to that fund of mutual affection which to the lovers' eyes appeared to be already so great and inexhaustible.

7. After allowing their due weight to these facts on the one side and on the other, the conviction remains, at least to me, that though love does not often die, though it be ever ready in the time of bitter trial to show itself still the paramount feeling, yet, in the every-day life, the charm and the beauty of the early love are sadly missed. That is what makes the sight of a bride so sad to me. Even the passing glimpse of one who is a stranger to me, driving with her father to the church, sends a sudden thrill through my being, and forces the painful comparison of the high hopes and the passionate devotion with the long, slow growing of the conviction that those hopes were too high and that devotion a devotion indeed—a sacrifice, accepted truly, but not understood. That is the dull, depressing fate, whose shadow is on the orange flower, and whose wail is in the echoes of the wedding march.