

**AN EXPERIMENT IN
MARRIAGE:
A ROMANCE**

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An experiment in marriage: a romance by Charles J. Bellamy

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CHARLES J. BELLAMY

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EXPERIMENT IN MARRIAGE.

A ROMANCE,

BY
CHARLES J. BELLAMY,
AUTHOR OF "THE BRETON MILLS," "A MOMENT OF
MADNESS," ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

In the dining-room of one of the fashionable clubs of New York two men were just finishing a late supper. They had taken their favorite table in the corner near the window, so that when conversation flagged there were always the busy streets to glance down upon, streets almost as light in the glare of the fierce electric light by night as by day in sunlight. Harry Vinton, the younger of the two, was intensely imaginative, or perhaps it was remarkably observing. To his mind every individual, every group in the crowded street, was a fit subject for a poem or a romance. Their stories they carried in their faces, he thought, revealed them in their gait, even in the fit of their garments. Not one story of them all was commonplace. All had their elements of tragedy, of heroic self-sacrifice, or of devilish malignity, of grand philosophy perhaps, or of despair utter and black as everlasting night.

His companion, John Ward, a professional idler, regarded Vinton as well nigh a necessity to make life endurable. Vinton was always entertaining to him, always suggestive, endowing the most ordinary scene with interest of its own, and drawing from the most prosaic surroundings hints for conversation always full of life, or varied with endless discussion and disagreement.

But on this occasion there was no need to glance down into the street for suggestions to conversation. So engaging was their topic that they left unnoticed the ices ordered to finish their meal, and those dainty

devices of modern epicureanism were slowly resolving themselves into their most unappetizing elements unregarded and unregretted.

"I tell you, Ward," exclaimed the younger man, with an emphasis all his own, "You are not looking the situation fairly in the face. The woman question has not been solved, and until it is solved, society will have to stay in a bad way. Until the relations of the sexes are properly adjusted, we can have no real reform, nor progress."

Ward laughed, glanced at the door through which two tall gentlemen were entering, and interrupted the reply on his lips by saying: "There is Bevan; I wish I could catch his eye and get him over here. He's always good company. He has a stranger with him I see, probably a business acquaintance. Bevan is always thinking of money getting."

"Never mind Bevan; if you have any thing to say on this woman question worth listening to, say it."

"Don't be impatient, Harry, my boy. The question will wait for us. It has been waiting for a good many hundred years. The truth is it is a hard thing to ask of human nature, that it will behave itself. For my part I don't expect any such consummation, so I don't expect the woman question ever to be settled."

"There you go again with your attempts to be epigrammatic," retorted Vinton, impatiently. "Drop that sort of thing, you really should, if you pretend to be a seeker after truth. An epigram is always a lie. These smooth sentences that round off so delightfully are snares of the evil one, set for the unwary, I don't doubt, by the great father of lies himself."

"You know you like them, Vinton," replied his friend, satirically. "It is the grief of your life that you cannot make them yourself as well as I. But, really, what is the perversion of the sexual relation, which we are deploring, but one of the manifestations of original sin, or whatever you heretics may choose to call the in-

born disposition of humanity to do wrong whenever it has a chance. We steal, we cheat, we defraud, we kill, because we are bad. We are a bad lot, my boy, and I regret to say I see no promise of our improving. The faults of society are the faults of the souls and consciences belonging to the men and women who make up society. The relations of husbands to their wives, or of wives to their husbands, are so unsatisfying, so disappointing, because men and women do not cease to be men and women and become angels when they marry. Marriage is no more, as it is no less a failure than the other relations of mankind. Marriage is a failure because human nature is a failure."

"But compare lovers before marriage with the married men and women. Indeed, the very word 'lovers' is almost exclusively appropriated for the ante-nuptial period. The lover is what a man and woman might always be in relation to each other. The average marriage illustrates what they should not be."

"Carry your comparison a little farther, my dear Harry. Examine your lover at the beginning and at the end of a long engagement. He soon ceases his unselfish devotion, and exchanges his adoring attitude for one of familiar, and half-contemptuous criticism."

"Of course what is true of the married state is true of long engagements. The latter unite all the restraints with none of the consolations of marriage. But I think that there are just enough exceptions to the rule of cooling lovers, and estranged husbands and wives, to prove that it may be because the relations of the sexes are distorted that they yield so little harmony, that men and women might be to each other after marriage what lovers now dream, if — if —"

"If we were all angels or saints," interrupted Ward.

Then he turned half around in his chair so that he could see the table where the two gentlemen who had lately entered were sitting. "They are just finishing a Welsh rare-bit. Suppose we ask Bevan to bring his

friend over here. Four heads are better than two, and this is a hard task we are essaying to-night."

Vinton nodded his head in assent, and Ward crossed over to the table where Mr. Bevan and the stranger were sitting. Vinton saw Ward bow to the stranger, who rose from his chair with great cordiality in response to the introduction. Then the three gentlemen, followed by the waiter with pencil and wine-card, approached the table in the corner where three vacant chairs and one ready tongue awaited them.

For a few minutes after the addition to the party in the corner the conversation was strictly conventional. It was of course first necessary to make Vinton acquainted with Mr. Bevan's companion, a man of about thirty, tall, and distinguished in bearing, and graceful in manner. He was introduced as a dealer in California grapes and wines, a frequent visitor to New York, where he came to dispose of enormous quantities of those toothsome articles of merchandise.

"My friend Gillette," began Mr. Bevan, as the waiter filled the four glasses with California Moselle, ordered out of special compliment to the visitor— "My friend Gillette's grapes might have been grown in one vineyard, and his wines have come from one cellar, they run so remarkably alike. But of course there is no single producer who could have such an enormous output to offer for sale. He is a very mysterious fellow, is my friend Gillette, and I understand no more about him now than I did three years ago, when I bought my first lot of him. It was only a tenth as large as the invoice I took to-day, eh Gillette?"

"Next year I hope to have twice as much to sell you. But why talk business longer?" And Gillette cast an apologetic glance at the two gentlemen to whom he had just been introduced. "You and I have made our bargain, and, what is very rare in this selfish city, are both satisfied. Why annoy these gentlemen with our mercenary dealings?"

"I assure you," interposed Vinton with his peculiarly magnetic smile, "if there is any mystery likely to be solved there is nothing could please my friend Ward and myself more."

"Now, Gillette, is a golden opportunity for you," said Mr. Bevan. "Reveal your mystery. Do you know I always suspected you of being the dictator of some little realm in an unknown corner of our wild West, where grapes grow for the asking, and whose people work for love of you."

"If you had said for love of each other," remarked Gillette, with a peculiar inflection, "you would have better described it—that is, have better described a model state of society." Then in a sudden change of voice, "but I positively decline to constitute myself the hero of this conversation. Didn't Mr. Ward say, as he invited us to join you, that help was wanted to settle some very abstruse question?"

"We were discussing the relations of the sexes," remarked Vinton, after a short pause. Then he lifted his sparkling glass. His companions imitated him, and then waited before tasting the wine until the young man should offer the expected toast. "Here is to woman, who might be the greatest force for good and happiness." The four glasses were drained and set down as Vinton added: "But is not."

"How far have you progressed?" asked Gillette, leaning across the table with very noticeable interest. Then with a keen glance from Vinton to Ward, he added: "I am under the impression you did not come very near agreeing."

Bevan laughed. "You will have to look out for my friend Gillette. He's a great guesser, an intuitist."

Ward waited an instant for Vinton to state their respective positions, but as the latter seemed in no haste to speak, volunteered the following:

"Vinton thinks married men and women should always be to each other as the same individuals when