

ESSAYS
ON THE
PURSUITS OF WOMEN.

REPRINTED FROM
FRASER'S AND MACMILLAN'S MAGAZINES.

ALSO
A PAPER ON FEMALE EDUCATION,
Read before the Social Science Congress, at Guildhall.

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LONDON:
EMILY FAITHFULL,
Printer and Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty,
PRINCES STREET, HANOVER SQUARE, AND 83A, FARRINGDON STREET.
1863.

ESSAY II.

CELIBACY v. MARRIAGE.

Reprinted from Fraser's Magazine, February, 1862.

How to be Happy though Married, was the rather significant title of a quaint little treatise of the seventeenth century, still to be perused in old libraries. "Le mariage," says Fénelon, "est un état de tribulation très pénible auquel il faut se préparer en esprit de pénitence quand on's'y croit appelé." * Between these views of holy matrimony and those popularly attributed to Belgravian mothers, there exists so vast a difference that we cannot but suggest (considering the importance of the subject), that the Social Science Association should appoint a special department to examine the matter. Male and female reformers would find topics for many interesting papers in debating the relative benefits to society of "selfish domestic felicity," and sublimely "disinterested celibacy," as now inculcated from many quarters. An able article has lately appeared in a contemporary periodical, entitled "Keeping up Appearances." It

* *Sentimens et Avis Chrétiens*, chap. 1.

propounds, in brief, the following doctrine:—"That it is not a question of appearances, but of very substantial realities, whether a family in the rank of gentefolk have to live on three or four hundred a year in England; that where this is the case it is impossible but that Paterfamilias, be he lawyer, doctor, divine, or man of letters, must needs, in all his ways and works, regard, *not* the pure aim of his profession, but the pecuniary interests involved therein. His wife is oppressed with household cares, and his children have hardly the means of health and suitable education. Under these circumstances, no man with common feelings can act with the same disregard of mercenary considerations as he might do were he living alone on an income sufficient to supply his bachelor necessities. He must needs "keep an eye to the main chance," and consider at all moments, how will it pay for me to act in this manner? Can I afford to offend this influential man, to write this outspoken book, to preach this unpopular doctrine? Thus we arrive at the very awkward conclusion that all the most gifted and devoted men who do not happen to inherit £1,000 a year, or to fall in love with an heiress, are bound in honour never to marry, at least until that goodly maturity of years when their professional earnings may have realized such an income. In a word, all our best men must be celibates—all our women who marry at all must put up with rather mercenary husbands (always excepting elder sons),

and all the children of the next generation must be born of parents the least likely to convey to them any remarkable faculties or exalted principles. Ragnarok, of course, may be expected in the ensuing century.

Now this argument is much too cogent in itself, and much too well urged from really noble points of view, not to deserve serious investigation. If it be indeed true that no married man with small means can be perfectly disinterested, then we have come upon a new and most important item to be added to that sum of objections to wedlock, which the present order of things is daily bringing forward. As the expediency system of ethics is passing out of men's minds, the notion gains ground that all true work must be *disinterested* work. We begin dimly to perceive the truth that in human nature there are too great forces, one all noble and generous; the centrifugal force of LOVE, which carries us out of and above ourselves; the other, all base and narrow, the centripetal force of SELFISM, which brings us back to our own personal interests and desires. Every profession may be followed in one or other of these ways. Statescraft, war, science, art, philanthropy, may be pursued from pure love of our country or our kind, pure devotion to truth, or beauty, or justice. Or, on the other hand, they may be followed from selfish ambition, personal interest, and vanity. Our *affections* obey the same law, for we may love our friends for their own sakes, and be willing to give our happiness for theirs;

or we may love them merely for our selfish gratification in their intercourse, striving not to make them better and happier, but to narrow their heart and soul to ourselves. Our *moral* natures are in the same case, for we may obey the law of duty from simple allegiance to the eternal right, with the motto in our hearts, *Fais ce que doit advenir que pourra*; or we may be just, and true, and charitable, for the sake of human reward on earth or celestial payment in heaven. And, finally, even *religion* may be pure, or may be selfish. We may love God himself because He is supremely, infinitely good, and worthy of the love of all the hearts He has made; or we may serve Him with souls filled with servile fears and selfish hopes, favoured servants in a disfavoured universe, offering to the holy Lord of Good the homage which Eclogé and Acté paid to Nero.

Yes! If anything good, or noble, is ever to be done on earth, it must be done *disinterestedly*. The man of action and the man of thought must alike work because they love the true, the good, the beautiful, and genuinely desire (each in his own way) to realize them on earth. If their own interest cannot be wholly forgotten, yet it must be entirely subordinated to the nobler aim. The clergyman must preach what he finds to be true; the statesman legislate as he thinks right; the poet write what he feels to be beautiful; and none of them deign to consider—Will this sermon stop my preferment? Will this Act of Parliament

offend my party? Will this book draw on me the lash of such a Review? He who truly achieves any good on earth, must surely do it in this spirit of disinterested devotion.

Now is it true that marriage without wealth must curb and check all these nobler impulses? Must the husband and father be a baser man, at all events a less true and brave one, than he was as a bachelor? If not selfish for himself, must he now grow wife-selfish, child-selfish, interested for those who belong to him, as he would disdain to be for himself?

It must be admitted this is a difficult question. There seems no small danger that the answer must be one which would land us in the monstrous conclusion that the condition which God has appointed as the natural one for human beings, is calculated inevitably to debase their purest aspirations. To find a less deplorable solution, let us go further back in our problem. What have we assumed a wife to be? A wholly passive medium of expenditure, like a conservatory or a pack of hounds?

The author of the article under debate admits with astonishing candour, that the *woman's* interest and happiness are necessarily sacrificed by the proper fulfilment of the man's destiny. He quotes Kingsley's aphorism with approbation—

Man must work and woman must weep.

Truly this conclusion, whereby no inconsiderable portion of the human race is consigned to the highly un-

profitable occupation of "weeping," might have excited some doubts of the accuracy of the foregoing ratiocinations. It is not easy, we should suppose, for women generally to accept this matter of "weeping" as the proper end of their creation! At all events, if they occasionally indulge henceforth in the solace of tears, we cannot believe they will shed them for the loss of the connubial felicity to be enjoyed with those "workers," who so readily appoint them such a place in the order of the world.

Leaving aside, however, this piece of "muscular sociology," let us seriously inquire whether the true destiny of woman, if rightly understood, would not serve to make right this puzzle of life, and show that *if the wife were what the wife should be*, the husband would not need to grow more mercenary and more worldly to supply her wants, but would rather find her pure and religious influence raise him to higher modes of thinking, and a nobler and more devoted life, than either man or woman can attain alone.

The *actual* fact must, alas! be admitted. The cares of a family have a tendency to make a man interested; and what is much worse, the wife too frequently uses her influence the wrong way, and prompts her husband even to more worldly and prudential considerations than he would be inclined spontaneously to entertain.

Woman's natural refinement leads her to give too

high a value to outward polish, and, consequently, to tend always to seek social intercourse above her own natural circle. It is nearly always the *wives* of shopkeepers, merchants, professional men, and the smaller gentry, who are found pushing their families into the grade a step higher, and urging the often-recalcitrant husband to the needful toadyism and expenditure. Woman is Conservative, or rather feudal, by instinct, if she be not by some accident vehemently prejudiced the other way; and her unacknowledged but very real political influence is constantly exercised to check aspirations after progress of the rational kind

Of Freedom slowly broadening down
From precedent to precedent.

Worse than all, the education she now receives, makes her a bigot in religion. To *her*, the sources of wider and broader thought on the greatest of all subjects, are usually closed from childhood. The result is, that a timid and narrow creed constantly fetters the natural religious instincts of her heart, and she can exercise in no degree the influence over her husband's soul which her genuine piety might otherwise effect. If he venture to speak to her of the limits of his belief, she gives him reproach instead of sympathy; if he tell her he doubts the conclusions of her favourite preacher, she bursts into tears! Men have kept women from all share in the religious progress of the age, and the deplorable result is, that women are

notoriously the drags on that progress. Instead of feeling like their Teuton forefathers, that their wives were "in nearer intercourse with the divinity than men," the Englishmen of to-day feel that their wives are the last persons with whom they can seek sympathy on religious matters. Half with tenderness for their good hearts, half with contempt for their weak minds, they leave them to the faith of the nursery, and seek for congenial intercourse only among men, hardheaded and honest, perhaps, in the fullest degree, yet without a woman's native spring of trust and reverence.

All these things tend to make wives fail in performing their proper part of inspiring feelings of devotion to noble causes. And further, a woman's ignorance of real life leads her to attach to outward show a value which it actually bears only in the opinion of other women as foolish as herself, and by no means in the eyes of anything which deserves to be called society at large. The *real* world—"the world of women and men,"

Alive with sorrow and sin,
Alive with pain and with passion,

does *not* concern itself so very earnestly with the number of the domestics and the antiquity of the millinery of its friends, as these ladies fondly imagine. Mrs. Grundy *lives*—she is a fact; but she is a very small and unimportant fact in life. Anybody with an ounce of pluck may cut Mrs. Grundy dead in the

street, and never be troubled by her again. People do want some few things to make up their ideas of a gentleman or a lady, but they are not exactly what may be bought for even twice as many hundreds a year as our author has supposed, nor yet forfeited by the loss of any amount of stock in the Bank. A friend long resident in Italy, on reading these formidable statements, asked us ironically, "Pray, how many hundreds a year does it take to make a gentleman in England, and how many more go to making a lady?" No! we are not fallen so low as all this. Let a man or woman be honourable, refined, well-bred, agreeable in conversation: then there is little chance they will be turned out of the sphere to which they were born, because they keep two servants instead of a dozen, and use a hired cab instead of a carriage. It is miserable odious "flunkeyism" which attaches such infinite importance to these things; and the books of our day which represent them as holding the most prominent place in the thoughts of men, are utterly false to the realities of our social state. *Vanity Fair* is one stage of Pilgrim's Progress, but there are fifty others. To represent English social life as if it were the ineffable mass of meanness these books would make it, is a libel against human nature at which it is marvellous men do not rise in scorn and indignation.

"Ay—but," observed to us once a well-known writer, "all this meanness is a part of life! It is

competent, then, to an author, if he please, to make it the staple of his fictions.”

“And give them as true pictures of human nature?”
• we demanded.

“Yes, surely.”

“We were in Egypt this year,” we answered. “Suppose we gave an account of our *impressions de voyage*, and omitted all mention of the Nile, the Pyramids, the Sphynx, the palm-trees, and only described accurately certain small nocturnal troublers of our repose? Would that be a fair description of grand old Egypt? You know it would be quite *true*? There *were* those Becky Sharps!”

It is needless to discuss at any length how a wife's belief that these outward “appearances” are of real importance, must unfit her for properly meeting the problems of a limited income. She thinks it a good investment to expend on show, what would suffice to procure very substantial comforts. There *is* a great truth in the *Times*' observation—“All the meaner and more miserable part of economical cares and discussions refers to ‘appearances;’ for the sense of pettiness and shame cannot attach to the actual needs of health and comfort, but only to the aspect our poverty may bear in the eyes of those whom we are senseless enough to wish should suppose us to be rich.” In particular, the wives of poor gentlemen seem almost invariably to make it a point of conscience to dress with more richness and variety than those of

wealthy men. Delicate taste and a generally ladylike appearance will not suffice,—they must *prove* they are not poor, precisely because all their acquaintances know that they are so. *Moire antique* is the invariable uniform of the wives of unsuccessful physicians, briefless barristers, and younger sons.

But supposing these mistakes of women removed; suppose (what ought to be the ordinary course of the marriages of professional men) that the wife brings a portion which covers her added share of the joint household, and that she expends the common income judiciously. Here is the material basis for a well-ordered life. Now, does it appear that the husband in such a case is likely to be less disinterested than he was when he was single? There is only one answer. It depends on the wife's own character. If she encourage him in every noble aim and disinterested action, it will hardly happen but that he will keep up to his former standard—nay, rise far above it. On the other hand, if she urge selfish considerations at every turn; if she palliate meanness and deprecate self-sacrifice;—then indeed the natural temptations of avarice and selfish ambition *have* a most powerful, almost an invincible ally in the wife, faithless to her holy duty of sustaining her husband's soul in life's great battle.

It is little understood how in all human relations the moral influences we begin by exercising, go on re-acting *ad infinitum* from one to the other in pro-

portion to the closeness of the relationship. A (we will suppose) starts, by a little weak fondness, encouraging B to some small piece of selfishness or indolence, because he is fatigued. B cannot well help returning the compliment shortly, and making excuses for A not performing some duty on account of the weather. Next day it is an unkind sentiment, which passes unchecked; then a harsh word; and so on and so on. On the other hand, if, with whatever effort, the one encourage the other to exert himself—to sacrifice comfort for duty—to think kindly of disagreeable people—to speak only what is right and sincere,—then from that side also comes an influence raising step by step the virtue of the other. In higher ways still, the same truth holds good. Any two people who live much together (even in less tender connexion than husband and wife), cannot fail most importantly to colour each other's views of the great purposes of life. Live with one to whom the centripetal force of Selfism is paramount, and it is hardly possible to avoid contemplating everything from a selfish point of view. Live with one for ever carried beyond his own interests by the centrifugal force of pure Love for truth, for right, for man, for God, and it is impossible but that the divine fire in such a breast will kindle the embers in our own, till we blush to remember we have lived for lower aims and our own poor paltry happiness.

These discussions on the moral aspects of marriage

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assume a special significance at this moment, since from many other quarters obstacles are arising which must all tend towards rendering (for a long time, at least) celibacy more and more common and desirable. We have heard, perhaps, more than enough of these obstacles on the *man's* side. Let us, therefore, turn for a moment to consider those which must render women less willing than formerly to enter into such relation.

In the first place, till lately the condition of an unmarried woman of the upper classes was so shackled by social prejudices that it was inevitably a dreary and monotonous one. Mostly, the "old maid" lived in a small house or lodging, out of which she rarely dared to sally on any journey, and where, with a few female friends as closely limited as herself, she divided her life, as the Frenchman has it, between "*la méditation, le jeu, et la dévotion.*" A society of these unhappy ones was once not inappropriately nicknamed by a witty nobleman "the Bottled Wasps." It is half piteous, half ridiculous, to hear of the trifles which occupy these poor shrivelled hearts and minds. We once called on a very worthy and even clever member of the sisterhood residing in Bath. Her features were discomposed—her voice somewhat shriller than usual. We inquired considerably of the cause of affliction.

"I am going to leave my lodgings."

"I am sorry to hear it. They seem very nice."

"Yes, yes; but I can bear it no longer! Do you

not observe there are two mats in the passage—one at the hall-door, one at the door of my room?”

“It escaped my notice.”

“Well, there they are. And for seven-and-twenty times—I have counted them!—seven-and-twenty times the people of the house have passed by the mat at the hall door and come and wiped their feet on my mat, and made me think visitors were coming, and get off the sofa and take off my spectacles; and then nobody came in! I am going away to-morrow.”

I think, however, this sort of existence will probably end with the present generation. The “old maid” of 1861 is an exceedingly cheery personage, running about untrammelled by husband or children; now visiting her relatives’ country houses, now taking her month in town, now off to a favourite *pension* on Lake Geneva, now scaling Vesuvius or the Pyramids. And, what is better, she has found not only freedom of locomotion, but a sphere of action peculiarly congenial to her nature. “My life, and what shall I do with it?” is a problem for which she finds the happiest solution ready to her hand in schools and hospitals without number. No longer does the Church of Rome monopolize the truth, that on a woman who has no husband, parent, or child, every sick and suffering man, every aged childless woman, every desolate orphan, has a claim. She has not fewer duties than other women, only more diffused ones. The “old maid’s” life may be as rich, as blessed, as that of the proudest of mo-

thers with her crown of clustering babes. Nay, she feels that in the power of devoting her *whole* time and energies to some benevolent task, she is enabled to effect perhaps some greater good than would otherwise have been possible. “On n'enfante les grandes œuvres que dans la virginité.”

And further, if a woman have but strength to make up her mind to a single life, she is enabled by nature to be far more independently happy therein than a man in the same position. A man, be he rich or poor, who returns at night to a home adorned by no woman's presence and domestic cares, is at best dreary and uncomfortable. But a woman makes her home for herself, and surrounds herself with the atmosphere of taste and the little details of housewifely comforts. If she have no sister, she has yet inherited the blessed power of a woman to make true and tender friendships, such as not one man's heart in a hundred can even imagine; and while he smiles scornfully at the idea of friendship meaning anything beyond acquaintance at a club, or the intimacy of a barrack, she enjoys one of the purest of pleasures and the most unselfish of all affections.

Nor does the “old maid” contemplate a solitary age as the bachelor must usually do. It will go hard but she will find a *woman* ready to share it. And more! —(but it is a theme we may not treat of here). She thinks to *die*, if without having given or shared some of the highest joys of human nature, yet at least with-

out having caused one fellow-being to regret she was born to tempt to sin and shame. We ask it in all solemn sadness—Do the *men* who resolve on an unmarried life, fixedly purpose also so to die with as spotless a conscience?

And on the other hand, while the utility, freedom, and happiness of a single woman's life have become greater, the *knowledge* of the risks of an unhappy marriage (if not the risks themselves) has become more public. The Divorce Court, in righting the most appalling wrongs to which the members of a civilized community could be subjected, has revealed secrets which must tend to modify immensely our ideas of English domestic felicity. Well it is that these hideous revelations should take place, for, as Carlyle says, "To nothing but error can any truth be dangerous;" and the fatal error of hasty marriage is constantly due to ignorance of the possibilities of some forms of offence among the apparently respectable classes of society. It has always been vaguely known, indeed, that both husbands and wives sometimes broke their most solemn vows and fell into sin; but it was reserved for the new law to show how many hundreds of such tragedies underlie the outwardly decorous lives, not only of the long-blamed aristocracy, but of the middle ranks in England. But beside that most grievous wrong, who imagined that the wives of English *gentlemen* might be called on to endure from their husbands the violence and cruelty we are accustomed

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to picture exercised only in the lowest lanes and courts of our cities, where drunken ruffians, stumbling home from the gin-palace, assail the miserable partners of their vices with curses, kicks, and blows? Who could have imagined it possible, that well-born and well-educated men, in honourable professions, should be guilty of the same brutality? Imagine a handsomely-furnished drawing-room, with its books, and flowers, and lights, and all the refinements of civilized life, for the scene of similar outrages. Imagine the offender a well-dressed gentleman, tall and powerful as English gentlemen are wont to be; the victim shrinking from his blows—a gentle, high-bred English *lady*! Good God! does not the picture make every true man set his teeth, and clench his hand?

Now these things *are* so. The Divorce Court has brought dozens of them to light; and we all know well that for one wife who will seek public redress for her wrongs, there are always ten, who, for their childrens' sakes, will bear their martyrdoms in silence. True martyrs they are—the sorest tried, perhaps, of any in the world—God help and comfort them! But single women can surely hardly forget these things, or fail to hesitate to try a lottery in which there may be one chance in a thousand of such a destiny. Thus, then, on the man's side, we have got arrayed against marriage all the arguments we have heard so often—economy, independence, freedom of risk of an uncongenial, a bad-tempered, a sickly, or an unfaithful wife;

and, lastly, this new principle, that, to pursue his calling disinterestedly, he must be untrammelled by the ties of a dependent family. And, on the woman's side, we have got a no less formidable range of objections; the certainty now offered to her of being able to make for herself a free, useful, and happy life alone, and the demonstrated danger of being inexpressibly miserable should she choose either an unfaithful or a cruel husband.

The conclusion seems inevitable, that marriage will become more and more rare, in spite of all Belgravian or other mothers can do. Instead of all young men intending, at some time or other, to marry, and all young women looking forward to be wives, we shall find many of them both resolving on a celibate life.

But the tide must turn at last. Marriage was manifestly the Creator's plan for humanity, and therefore we cannot doubt that it will eventually become the rule of all men and women's lives. When that time arrives, both sexes will have learned weighty lessons. The Englishman of the twentieth century will abandon those claims of marital authority, whose residue he still inherits from days when might made right, and from lands of Eastern sensuality, where woman is first the slave of her own weakness, and then inevitably the slave of man. When the theory of the "Divine Right of Husbands" has followed to limbo that of the "Divine Right of Kings," and a prece-

dency in selfishness is no longer assumed to be the sacred privilege of masculine strength and wisdom, then will become possible a conjugal love and union nobler and more tender by far than can ever exist while such claims are even tacitly supposed. Of all true, holy, human love, as distinguished from the love of the hound and the slave, Chaucer said right well—

When mastery cometh, then sweet Love anon
Flappeth his nimble wings, and soon away is gone.

And abandoning his authority (save such as real wisdom and power of nature must ever secure), man will also abandon that direful licence of which we hear so much—the licence to be less pure and faithful than a woman while escaping the same penalty of disgrace. Then will the husband bring to his wife feelings as fresh as those which now are too often her contribution alone to their joint happiness.

And the Englishwoman of the twentieth century will, on her part, learn to rise above her present pitiful ambitions of social advancement and petty personal vanity—the thousand childish foibles in which she now thinks it her right to indulge. She will be ready to cope with poverty, and encourage her husband cheerfully to bear it for life, rather than sully the noblest of his aspirations. She will learn that no longer must morality be divided between them; Truth and Courage for him, and Chastity and Patience for her; but that she, too, must be true as an honourable *man* is

true, and brave in her own sphere of duty as he is brave in his, if she would exchange his half-contemptuous gallantry for genuine respect. And, finally, she will share her husband's religion, she will boldly confront the doubts of his understanding by the intuitions of her heart; she will help him to *love*, as he will help her to *knowledge*. And thus together may they reach a nobler and a warmer faith than the world yet has seen.

Essays on the pursuits of women.

Cobbe, Frances Power, 1822-1904.

London, E. Faithfull, 1863.

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