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<SWEETS OF MARRIED LIFE.>

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Marriage, which most girls consider the sole aim of their existence

and the end of all their anxieties, is often the beginning of a set of

troubles which none among them expect, and which, when they come, very

few accept with the dignity of patience or the reasonableness of

common sense. Hitherto the man has been the suitor, the wooer. It has

been his \_métier\_ to make love; to utter extravagant professions; to

talk poetry and romance of an eminently unwearable kind; and to swear

that feelings, which by the very nature of things it is impossible to

maintain at their present state of fever heat, will be as lasting as

life itself and never know subsidence nor diminution. And girls

believe all that their lovers tell them. They believe in the

absorption of the man's whole life in the love which at the most

cannot be more than a part of his life; they believe that things will

go on for ever as they have begun, and that the fire and fervour of

passion will never cool down to the more manageable warmth of

friendship. And in this belief of theirs lies the rock on which not a

few make such pitiful shipwreck of their married happiness. They

expect their husbands to remain always lovers. Not lovers only in the

best sense, which of course all happy husbands are to the end of time,

but lovers as in the old fond, foolish, courting days. They expect a

continuance of the romance, the poetry, the exaggeration, the \_petits

soins\_, the microscopic attentions, the absorption of thought and

interest, the centralization of his happiness in her society, just as

in the days when she was still to be won, or, a little later, when,

being won, she was new in the wearing. And as we said before, a wife's

first trial, and her greatest, is when her husband begins to leave off

this kind of fervid love-making and settles down into the tranquil

friend.

As with children so is it in the nature of most women to require

continual assurances. Very few believe in a love which is not

frequently expressed; while the ability to trust in the vital warmth

of an affection that has lost its early feverishness is the mark of a

higher wisdom than most of them possess. To make them thoroughly happy

a man must be always at their feet; and they are jealous of

everything--even of his work--that takes him away from them, or gives

him occasion for thought and interest outside themselves. They are

rarely able to rise to the height of married friendship; and if they

belong to a reticent and quiet-going man--a man who says 'I love you'

once for all, and then contents himself with living a life of loyalty

and kindness and not talking about it--they fret at what they call

his coldness, and feel themselves shorn of half their glory and more

than half their dues. They refuse to believe in that which is not

daily repeated. They want the incense of flattery, the excitement of

love-making; and if these desires are not ministered to by their

husbands, the danger is that they will get some one else to

'understand' them and feed the sentimentality which dies of inanition

in the quiet serenity of home. Moonlights; a bouquet of the earliest

flowers carefully arranged and tenderly presented; the changing lights

on the mountain tops; the exquisite song of the nightingale at two

o'clock in the morning; all the rest of those vague and suggestive

delights which once made the meeting-places of souls, and furnished

occasion for delicious ravings, become by time and use and the wearing

realities of business and the crowding pressure of anxieties, puerile

and annoying to the ordinary Englishman, who is not a poet by nature.

When all the world was young by reason of his own youth, and the fever

of the love-making time was on him, he was quite as romantic as his

wife. But now he is sobering down; life is fast becoming a very

prosaic thing to him; work is taking the place of pleasure, ambition

of romance; he pooh-poohs her fond remembrances of bygone follies, and

prefers his pipe in the warm library to a station by the open window,

watching the sunset because it looks as it did on \_that\_ evening, and

shivering with incipient catarrh. All this is very dreadful to her;

women, unfortunately for themselves, remaining young and keeping hold

much longer than do men.

The first defection of this kind is a pang the young wife never

forgets. But she has many more and yet more bitter ones, when the

defection takes a personal shape, and some pretty little attention is

carelessly received without its due reward of loving thanks. Perhaps

some usual form of caress is omitted in the hurry of the morning's

work; or some gloomy anticipation of professional trouble makes him

oblivious of her presence; or, fretted by her importunate attentions,

he buries himself in a book, more to escape being spoken to than for

the book's own merits.

Many a woman has gone into her own room and had a 'good cry' because

her husband called her by her baptismal name, and not by some absurd

nickname invented in the days of their folly; or because, pressed for

time, he hurried out of the house without going through the

established formula of leave-taking. The lover has merged in the

husband; security has taken the place of wooing; and the woman does

not take kindly to the transformation. Sometimes she plays a dangerous

game, and tries what flirting with other men will do. If her scheme

does not answer, and her husband is not made jealous, she is revolted,

and holds herself that hardly-used being, a neglected wife. She cannot

accept as a compliment the quiet trust which certain cool-headed men

of a loyal kind place in their wives; and her husband's tolerance of

her flirting manner--which he takes to be manner only, with no evil in

it, and with which, though he may not especially like it, he does not

interfere--seems to her indifference rather than tolerance. Yet the

confidence implied in this forbearance is in point of fact a

compliment worth all the pretty nothings ever invented; though this

hearty faith is just the thing which annoys her, and which she

stigmatizes as neglect. If she were to go far enough she would find

out her mistake. But by that time she would have gone too far to

profit by her experience.

Nothing is more annoying than that display of affection which some

husbands and wives show to each other in society. That familiarity of

touch, those half-concealed caresses, those absurd names, that

prodigality of endearing epithets, that devoted attention which they

flaunt in the face of the public as a kind of challenge to the world

at large to come and admire their happiness, is always noticed and

laughed at; and sometimes more than laughed at. Yet to some women this

parade of love is the very essence of married happiness and part of

their dearest privileges. They believe themselves admired and envied

when they are ridiculed and scoffed at; and they think their husbands

are models for other men to copy when they are taken as examples for

all to avoid.

Men who have any real manliness however, do not give in to this kind

of thing; though there are some, as effeminate and gushing as women

themselves, who like this sloppy effusiveness of love and carry it on

into quite old age, fondling the ancient grandmother with grey hair as

lavishly as they had fondled the youthful bride, and seeing no want of

harmony in calling a withered old dame of sixty and upwards by the pet

names by which they had called her when she was a slip of a girl of

eighteen. The continuance of love from youth to old age is very

lovely, very cheering; but even 'John Anderson my Jo' would lose its

pathos if Mrs. Anderson had ignored the difference between the raven

locks and the snowy brow.

All that excess of flattering and petting of which women are so fond

becomes a bore to a man if required as part of the daily habit of

life. Out in the world as he is, harassed by anxieties of which she

knows nothing, home is emphatically his place of rest--where his wife

is his friend who knows his mind; where he may be himself without the

fear of offending, and relax the strain that must be kept up out of

doors; where he may feel himself safe, understood, at ease. And some

women, and these by no means the coldest nor the least loving, are

wise enough to understand this need of rest in the man's harder life,

and, accepting the quiet of security as part of the conditions of

marriage, content themselves with the undemonstrative love into which

the fever of passion has subsided. Others fret over it, and make

themselves and their husbands wretched because they cannot believe in

that which is not for ever paraded before their eyes.

Yet what kind of home is it for the man when he has to walk as if on

egg-shells, every moment afraid of wounding the susceptibilities of a

woman who will take nothing on trust, and who has to be continually

assured that he still loves her, before she will believe that to-day

is as yesterday? Of one thing she may be certain; no wife who

understands what is the best kind of marriage demands these continual

attentions, which, voluntary offerings of the lover, become enforced

tribute from the husband. She knows that as a wife, whom it is not

necessary to court nor flatter, she has a nobler place than that which

is expressed by the attentions paid to a mistress.

Wifehood, like all assured conditions, does not need to be buttressed

up; but a less certain position must be supported from the outside,

and an insecure self-respect, an uncertain holding, must be

perpetually strengthened and reassured. Women who cannot live happily

without being made love to are more like mistresses than wives, and

come but badly off in the great struggles of life and the cruel

handling of time. Placing all their happiness in things which cannot

continue, they let slip that which lies in their hands; and in their

desire to retain the romantic position of lovers lose the sweet

security of wives. Perhaps, if they had higher aims in life than those

with which they make shift to satisfy themselves, they would not let

themselves sink to the level of this folly, and would understand

better than they do now the worth of realities as contrasted with

appearances. And yet we cannot but pity the poor, weak, craving souls

who long so pitifully for the freshness of the morning to continue far

into the day and evening--who cling so tenaciously to the fleeting

romance of youth. They are taken by the glitter of things--love-making

among the rest; and the man who is showiest in his affection, who can

express it with most colour, and paint it, so to speak, with the

minutest touches, is the man whose love seems to them the most

trustworthy and the most intense. They make the mistake of confounding

this show with the substance, of trusting to pictorial expression

rather than to solid facts. And they make that other mistake of

cloying their husbands with half-childish caresses which were all very

well in the early days, but which become tiresome as time goes on and

the gravity of life deepens. And then, when the man either quietly

keeps them off or more brusquely repels them, they are hurt and

miserable, and think the whole happiness of their lives is dead, and

all that makes marriage beautiful at an end.

What is to be done to balance things evenly in this unequal world of

sex? What indeed, is to be done at any time to reconcile strength with

weakness, and to give each its due? One thing at least is sure. The

more thoroughly women learn the true nature of men, the fewer mistakes

they will make and the less unhappiness they will create for

themselves; and the more patient men are with the hysterical

excitability, the restless craving, which nature, for some purpose at

present unknown, has made the special temperament of women, the fewer

\_femmes incomprises\_ there will be in married homes and the larger the

chance of married happiness. All one's theories of domestic life come

down at last to the give-and-take system, to bearing and forbearing,

and meeting half way idiosyncrasies which one does not personally

share.