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Marriage

By Jane Burr*

THE code of marriage towards which the civilised races are tending is what might be called Progressive Monogamy. This means that one man and one woman will live together in absolute faithfulness as long as they find rest and peace in one another, and will separate when this rest and peace is no longer possible.

The primary object of marriage is to beget and bear offspring, and on this basis man is at one with all mammals and most birds. The secondary object of marriage is the development of spiritual love between two persons, a love that stimulates and liberates our finest and most exalted activities.

Every marriage starts out with an effort to explain and to understand, but cross-currents soon become so involved that each party automatically decides it is easier to submit to fine cruelty than to assert himself. When both individuals are completely crushed and mutually owned, then the world with charming cynicism says, "This is a happy marriage."

In spite of the evidence of misery among the married people all about us, men and women continue to plunge into the great adventure. They plunge because they are lonely, and the younger they are the more lonely they are, therefore the more easily they fall in love and out again.

Loneliness is the greatest tragedy of the universe. The loneliness of youth is more devastating than the loneliness of age. There are millions of young people pacing the city streets and the country lanes in a frenzy of loneliness, separated from other lonely boys and girls because of timidity, inaccessibility, convention, and the sheer lack of a little cash.

* Jane Burr, known as "The Knickerbocker Woman," not being permitted by contract to write for the United Press, explains here the lines along which she opines the new "code" will be evolved.

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Over the civilised globe there hangs this tragedy of women and this tragedy of men—those who are free longing for bondage, those who are in bondage longing for freedom, everybody searching for the pure white flame, yet everybody compromising with sordidness that could be avoided, if only a new attitude could be legitimised.

No one wishes to abolish marriage. Pray don't imagine I am a wrecker or amoralist. Marriage cannot be abolished. It has always existed and always will exist. Even snakes go in pairs.

The thing that progressive people want to abolish is marriage as it exists to-day—in other words, the marriage of cast-iron convention no longer suitable to emancipating womanhood.

Marriage that is "made in heaven" usually ends in a locality somewhere beneath the earth's surface.

Intelligent people want marriage made on earth, where under decent conditions it might have a chance of remaining normal and lasting.

The first step towards the sane handling of the problem is to destroy the time-honoured cabal against youth. Poor youth! Nobody will be honest with him, nobody will tell him the truth.

When two young people feel a chemical excitement nobody warns them that after marriage the excitement will disappear and that they will stare into each other's eyes as one stares into the eyes of a stranger.

No matter how wretched our own marriage may have been, we teach our children that as it was so must it be, all's well with the world. Perhaps through youth's expectations, we clutch at romance once removed; perhaps through intended kindness, we display for him only the brilliance of the shield of love, concealing for a little while the blackness that lies hidden on the other side.

Wouldn't it be quite possible, by a truthful education, to avoid the chemical age? Instead of firing the mind of youth with insatiable desires, couldn't we teach him that passion is impersonal and fleeting, that friendship is personal and lasting; that passion may be felt for a being whose language we do not speak, but friendship is the result of understanding another's subtlest and most sacred emotions?

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Advocates of "The Love Feast" will say, "You are circumventing nature."

Well, why not?

We circumvent nature in the matter of roses, cactus plants, and pigs; why not show an equal interest in the cultivation of the human race? We have been sadly neglectful of poor humanity.

If we were taught from childhood the ugliness as well as the beauty of life, wouldn't we be qualified to choose a peaceful companion with whom we might raise the best cabbages in the neighbourhood, instead of wasting our energies (after marriage as well as before) in the hunt for an infantile, Arabian Nights illusion that is nowhere to be found?

By downright accident we sometimes emerge from the chemical throes of love with a partner who brings us peace. How then does society force us to handle our stroke of luck?

It forces us to live in the same house, to spend every possible moment together, to give up our old haunts and our old friends, to involve each other in the dull grind of domestic and economic machinery, only too often to suffer untold miseries.

The result is the wearing away of our finer sensibilities, the warping of our personalities, the slow on-creeping of monotony from which even a hibernating bear would struggle to escape.

Presuming a more useful and intelligent race of the future, a man and a woman who found peace in one another would go on with their separate jobs, live in their accustomed nooks, continue their old friendships, and cease to regard marriage as a finality, as at present. In other words, in an ideal state, husbands and wives would treat one another with the same consideration and decency as they naturally accord to utter strangers.

When divorce is universally granted on reasonable grounds, as is now the case in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, no one will be thrilled by an illegal union, divorces will cease to be a Press stunt, no one will run away on holidays alone. Men and women will abandon the possessive idea upon which conventional marriage—and love—was founded in the good old days.

The liberation of marriage will automatically cause the

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commercial and vulgar standard of luxury to go down and the standard of love will rise; conventionality will be swept into the ash-heap and a comradeship established between the sexes in which the opportunity of choice will be enlarged. Technical virginity will cease to be offered in exchange for life support and all stigma removed from a girl who has loved and given herself in love before marriage.

Children will, of course, be the greatest possible gift to the State, and the woman who produces them will be provided for, protected, and honoured. After all, this is a question of education.

Where and when there is no obligation to remain in bondage, and no disgrace attached to release, it is very possible that we shall settle down without undue commotion and turmoil to prove the morality of the new marriage code, and continue faithful to one mate "till death do us part."

Progressive Monogamy would then be real monogamy, because resting on free sanction, the one man and the one woman, in a spontaneous, unfettered union, for the first time in the history of the world.

