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‘Love and Sex.’

It is a physiological truth that the sexual nature of individuals is the last to mature. It would seem that the same truth applies in sociology: ideas may be matured on other matters, but even advanced thinkers have very undeveloped ideas on the matter of sexual relations. Not long ago Grant Allen had an article on the marriage question, in which he spoke somewhat depreciatingly of those “advanced women who are above sex,” and declared for the women who had the healthy desire to be mothers. Of one thing he was sure,—that the perpetuation of the race positively required that there should be mothers;—of the necessity of wives he jauntily remarked that it was of little or no importance. A correspondent took exception to the seemingly lax morality of the article, and the editor of the “*Popular Science Monthly*” pacified his correspondent and belittled himself by endeavoring to shield Grant Allen from the plain interference of his words, saying that, as the article was a scientific one, only a scientific and not a moral interpretation should be given to his meaning.

But the marriage and population questions are up to be settled. It is impossible to talk of population without talking of marriage, or to talk of marriage and not bring in sex relations. There is no half-way house or logical resting place between Catholicism or Atheism, or between despotism and Anarchy; neither is there any resting place between bond or slave love and free love; and whoever undertakes to discuss the question has sooner or later to strike this rock. Two esteemed radicals, Mr. Pentecost and Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace, have recently been driven in this direction, and both have endeavored to evade the necessary consequence, one from a sentimental, the other from a scientific standpoint; but they both closely agree in the end, Mr. Pentecost’s sentiment and Mr. Wallace’s science merging in a common conclusion.

It seems that Grant Allen has been at it again. He has lately written an article in which he says that girls should be taught that it is the duty of healthy and intelligent women to become mothers, and recommends them to choose as temporary husbands the finest, healthiest, and more intellectual men. This Mr. Wallace denounces as detestable and so revolting to his moral nature that he enters into no argument against it, but simply asserts that it would “impair family life and parental affection, and increase pure sensualism”; and so he endeavors to steer between the ideas of a writer in the “*Arena*” who would institute a degrading despotism of State control that would relegate women to the function of reproductive machines, and the ideas of free love as set forth by Grant Allen. He believes in permanent monogamic marriage, and quotes Miss Chapman, who argues that nature, instinct, history, science, and experience prove “that marriages turn out well or ill in proportion as husband and wife are loyal, sinking differences and even grievances for the sake of children and for the sake of example.”

That free love would impair family life,—“as generally understood,”—is true, though why it should destroy paternal affection and increase “pure sensualism” is not so plain. The parents, being intellectual and healthy, self-contained and self-respecting individuals, are not likely to call out less intelligent love in their offspring, and are themselves less likely to be the victims of unrestrained feeling. As to Miss Chapman’s argument that experience shows that loyal couples are most worthy, experience has also

shown, as Mona Caird puts it, that “the result of such marriages is that husband and wife become mere echoes, half-creatures, useless to the world, because they have run into a groove and let individuality die. There are a few things more stolidly irritating than a ‘very united couple.’”

However, Mr. Wallace sees that there are many industrial changes to be brought about before society will be able to entertain intelligent ideas on the marriage question, and so he proposes the cleansing of the Augean stables of our existing social organization and the realization of some sort of society (like Bellamyism) where the education of both sexes would not be complete till twenty-one. People would be taught the duty of late marriages, and the duty would be enforced by public opinion; the young women would be trained to look with scorn and loathing on all bad men, and be taught that the happiness of their whole lives depends on the care and deliberation with which they choose their husbands; and they would be urged to accept no suitor until he has proved himself worthy. As the society he contemplates renders women absolutely independent and gives them all the pleasures of society with all the refinements of education and culture, he says it is not probable that women will marry till twenty-five or thirty. But this is all supposition. Women are taught precisely this morality now, and are instructed that the highest virtue consists in making a good match, and are taught that the happiness of their whole lives depends more on property than love. Furthermore, why women who would enjoy all the advantages of high life and ease and culture and the luxury of independence should be less amative than now is not quite clear. This point brings Mr. Wallace to the scientific side of the question, and he takes as proven Spencer’s theory of individuation and genesis.

Before considering this subject let us go back to Mr. Pentecost, who does not believe in free love,—that is, free love based on sex. As there is no other love in dispute, it would be useless to refer to any other. There is no statute or social custom that limits any other love relation: a man or woman can be promiscuous in any other love relation, and so far from being ostracised, will gain credit and renown. A woman may lavish all her sentiment on great men and poets or stupid priests or heathens, so long as she draws the line at sex love; and a woman who loves all humanity or devotes herself to increasing the comforts of the sick or reforming her “fallen brothers,” individually or collectively, is generally considered a “good” woman, and her self-sacrificing qualities are set forth in dramas and novels as virtues; but if she oversteps the forbidden sex line, her virtues are forgotten and her vice is made the lesson. If Mr. Pentecost would not have loved based on sex, on what would he base it? Age, weight, color, opinions, or what? The reason why present relationships result so often in misery and failure is not because they are based on sex, but because they are also based on an element that would wreck any other union that men or women can enter into, *i.e.*, the element of Communism. Marriage, whether legal or free, that involves the idea of “duty” as generally understood, and eliminates individuality, is bound to result in failure.

Ibsen is the true prophet, not Tolstoi. Mona Caird’s articles and novel show far clearer scientific spirit than Tolstoi and his followers. As to Mr. Pentecost’s remark that the sexual passion is something of which “all but beasts are ashamed,” he goes back with Tolstoi to the ignorant and degraded Christians who believed that through woman’s charms sin and damnation entered the world. St. Paul and the Christian fathers looked upon the sex relation as an unclean thing. Tertullian said that woman ought always to feel repentant, seeing that she has been the destruction of the race, and he calls her the gate of hell. Origen said that marriage was an unholy and unclean thing and a means of sexual lust, and made a eunuch of himself,—which, by the way, does not destroy the desire. And Augustine said that celibates

will shine in heaven like dazzling stars, while the parents who begot them will resemble stars without light. Not only in this matter did the “pure and holy” early Christians despise carnal and fleshly pleasures, but in many others. The uncleanly saint who starved his sex nature for the glory of God also neglected all hygienic measures. To have enjoyed the carnal luxury of a Turkish bath would have been as sinful as to have enjoyed a woman. Physical pleasure was tabooed: music, dancing, tasteful food, or bodily ease. To mortify the flesh was moral, and to contemplate the divine, “live out of themselves” in a realm of fantasy and insanity, was the highest height of spiritual perfection, though their bodies were foul and diseased. But why be ashamed of one function more than another, or one faculty more than another? Does Mr. Pentecost take Comstock as his patron saint in preference to Walt Whitman? Is a beautiful living body more objectionable than a beautiful bit of sculpture? Is he ashamed of the necessary functions of organs for maintaining life as well as of the reproductive organs, and does he eat and drink in shame and in the dark? Is he ashamed to sweat, or to know that his liver secretes bile, and is it obscene to kiss and to feel the warm sweet breath of one he loves? Why call one attribute higher than another? A man may be a great mathematician and a bore; a great physiologist and a brute; a great orator and a beast. He may have a passion for music and painting or poetry and be very illogical. To be an Apollo and nothing more; or a musician and nothing more; or a logician or mathematician and nothing more, is to be but a one-sided, badly developed individual. To be a great thinker with a large frame and a powerful digestion and a beautiful form is to come nearer being a perfect man than to be a weakling and a dyspeptic. There is nothing sublime in dyspepsia, nor anything low in robustness. Goethe was an Apollo; would he have been a greater poet if he had been decrepit like Pope? Of course, exaggeration or perversion of any faculty or appetite is unwise and unhealthy, and therefore bad. But who is to determine the limit? The small eater, the weakling? Certainly not. Then why should Comstock and his kind decide where the line should be drawn as to amateness and as to what are the higher and lower faculties? A perfectly rounded-out man is equal in all his attributes; and he only “lowers” himself when he injures his health; and wrongs others only when he invades their equal liberty to live out their life.

But here Mr. Pentecost falls back on science and says that as the brain increases the sex nature grows less. And here he joins with Mr. Wallace, who cites Mr. Spencer’s theory as if it were proved. Grant Allen has shown that to keep the population stationary it is needful that every pair of human beings should produce four individuals. Mr. Spencer’s perfect equilibrium will be arrived at when such a condition will be the natural and normal state. Mr. Spencer says that we shall first have to attend to the due peopling of the globe and the raising of all its habitable parts into the highest state of culture; bring all processes for the satisfaction of human wants to perfection, and develop the intellect into complete competency for its work and the feelings into complete fitness for social life. But there are many incalculable elements to be allowed for. Says Mr. Spencer: “Supposing the sun’s light and heat, on which all terrestrial life depends, to continue abundant for a period long enough to allow the entire evolution we are contemplating, there are still certain slow astronomic and geologic changes which must prevent such complete adjustment of human nature to surrounding conditions as would permit the rate of multiplication to fall so low.”

So, supposing the theory to be true in the long run, it has no practical value as a guide to present generations. But I maintain the theory is not true. It is mainly made up of conclusions drawn from analogies. The only direct inferences are like those made by Mr. Wallace, that it is a “common observation that intellectual people do not as a rule have large families” and that many geniuses have died celibate or childless. It is also observed that intellectual people suffer from neurasthenia and chest

troubles. To base a theory on such slim facts is weak; first, the facts prove nothing in particular; factory women and puritans are often observed to be sterile. But I doubt the facts. It is “commonly observed” for the reason that highly intellectual people are more conspicuous than ordinary people, and when the fact is true it is noted because it is peculiar. Reference to a biographical dictionary would throw light on this matter and be more reliable than common observations. But supposing it true, it does not follow that they are less fertile,—it proves only that they have less children. French people generally have less children than Germans, and Americans less than the English, but it does not follow that their sexual nature is weaker. Some moralists are sorely troubled over the fact that geniuses are commonly observed to be immoral, and are asking why the sins of geniuses should be condoned more than the sins of everyday people.

There is an immense amount of hypocrisy in dealing with this subject. An English statistician has been compiling figures to show that the “better classes” marry less and later than the worst classes, and the implication is—or the figures mean nothing—that the lower classes are more carnal than their saintly superiors. No one, so far as I know, has publicly put the true interpretation on these facts, which is that the “better classes” are peculiarly better able to resort to “better class” prostitution. A syndicate article that has run through many large Sunday papers has recorded investigations as to bachelors of the better classes—those who belong to clubs and keep snug little suites and valets—and has discovered why men don’t marry. It goes into every petty detail as to their furniture, their habits of eating and dressing, how they spend their time, their amusements, and *some* of their vices, and the conclusion arrived at is that they lead such a jolly, free life that they do not care to restrict their pleasures by having such an expensive bit of property as a “better class” wife. The idea is carried through that these men are chaste, whereas there is not a reader, nor the writer either, who does not know that as a rule prostitution is the substitute for marriage; or rather, as things are among this class, one form of prostitution has supplanted another.

Then again we are told that women who use their brains, college graduates, etc., are generally sterile. As in the case of highly intellectual men, it is also commonly observed that these women are knock-kneed and flat-chested. There is a theory—a satire, I believe—that the coming man will be hairless and toothless and cold-footed; but as this theory depends upon the mothers being as intellectual as the fathers, and as it is asserted that the brain-working women are generally sterile, this theory would seem also to be sterile. Possibly it may be true that the flat-chested college women are generally sterile,—which is not the same thing as lacking sexual feeling,—but is it a necessity that they should forever remain physically inferior? Physiologists have shown why the average woman is weak and muscle-bound and short-winded; but all this is being changed. With woman’s entrance into colleges has come her development in the gymnasiums attached, and recently, at Harvard, Dr. Sargent made a fine showing of what can be done for women in this line. After a time there will be no reason why a female graduate shall be less athletic than the male graduate, or why she shall not compete in throwing handsprings, swinging Indian clubs, sprinting, and doing other feats of nerve and strength. When the weak class of graduates is supplanted by the robust, healthy class, is there any analogy to show that her sex nature will decline? Nobody will pretend that the male graduate is anywhere near chaste as a rule.

Again, the eliminating of the sex nature is not necessarily dependent upon intellect.

“In the time of St. Cyprian, before the Decian persecution, it had been common to find clergy professing celibacy, but keeping, under various pretexts, their mistresses in their houses; and after

Constantine the complaints on this subject became loud and general. Virgins and monks often lived together in the same house, and with a curious audacity of hypocrisy, which is very frequently noticed, they professed to have so overcome the passions of their nature that they shared in chastity the same bed.” (Lecky, History of European Morals.)

It will be noticed that Lecky throws scornful doubt on the truth of this conduct, though, if the intellect *vs.* sex theory is true, the facts of his own nature should have helped him to believe it.

Human nature is substantially the same in all civilized communities, at all times and places: different social institutions and environments may warp and give more or less

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play, but the nature of Greeks and Romans was little different from that of modern French, Americans, etc. Diogenes or Socrates, Cleopatra, Aspasia, Hypatia, and Theodora were pretty much the same sort of men and women, at bottom, as Carlyle and Schopenhauer, George Eliot and Sarah Bernhardt, or Emerson. The differences between Ramses I. and Abraham, or Mahomet and Brigham Young, or St. Augustine and Cardinal Newman, are differences of time and age, and not differences in nature, or physiological differences.

But while human nature will remain the same, institutions and creeds and ideas will change and grow, and the sex impulses will have freer scope, and the result—as in all other matters where freedom has prevailed—will be greater happiness. This is the peculiarity of the modern progressive spirit,—that it claims freedom in all things, and the individual is becoming more and more individualised. Never was the spirit of liberty so dominant as now—whatever may be said of its realization. History records no age when the idea of liberty was so broad, or when there was such a spirit for disintegrating institutions and customs. Never, before the present age, was the idea of free love conceived as being possible and desirable,—*i.e.* free all round, free for all: no castes, no classes, and no exceptions. So there is no evading the issue now. It is the old question of freedom against restraint, fought out in new fields. And the freedom means real freedom, freedom from spooks as well as “institutions.”

As for the consequences of this freedom, Mr. Pentecost and others need not fear. Intellect will not eliminate amativeness, but it will regulate and control and adapt the passion to newer conditions. Pleasurable feelings are more intense now than formerly; “worldly” joys are more varied and refined, and there is a greater desire to eat, drink, and be merry in proportion as the idea prevails that this life is our first, last, and only chance. But there is less coarseness and brutality, and a more artistic taste in all our enjoyments. There is a wide difference between the iron-fisted gladiator of Rome and John Sullivan of Boston, and in all our sports and pastimes more skill and less barbarity is in demand—though the nature of the sports be the same. So, in our sex relations, freedom will develop more refined natures and more considerate feelings. The barbarisms of marriage, involving the idea of chattel property in the wife; the indecencies of prostitution, the concomitant of marriage; the vulgar depravity of divorce courts and breach of promise cases, and the shootings and crimes committed by “outraged” husbands, will all be looked upon, in an age of freedom, as we moderns look upon wife-sellings, wife-beatings, etc., of the not very remote past. The average American woman with her idea of freedom is far from anything ideal, but as she is, she has too much sense of her own individuality to tolerate anything like sinking her personality, totally and unconditionally, in the family or the State, as did the Roman matron. Freedom

will work many changes, but it will never eliminate the sexual feeling—even to the extent of only half a dozen desires in a lifetime. Nor is it reasonable to suppose that desire will follow reason and a purpose only—the purpose of procreation. This is simple, sentimental teleology, that can find no support in biology. In order that such a new variety of human beings may grow up, free play must be given to natural selection—as in the case of the brutes. Scientific knowledge may teach man how to modify consequences and how to adapt himself to new environment,—but science can not teach him how to change “himself.”

A.H. Simpson.

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.