

Marriage and Love

BY

EMMA GOLDMAN

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MARRIAGE AND LOVE

The popular notion about marriage and love is that they
are synonymous,
that they spring from the same motives, and cover the
same human needs.

Like most popular notions this also rests not on actual
facts, but on
superstition.

Marriage and love have nothing in common; they are as

far apart as the poles; are, in fact, antagonistic to each other. No doubt some marriages have been the result of love. Not, however, because love could assert itself only in marriage; much rather is it because few people can completely outgrow a convention. There are today large numbers of men and women to whom marriage is naught but a farce, but who submit to it for the sake of public opinion. At any rate, while it is true that some marriages are based on love, and while it is equally true that in some cases love continues in married life, I maintain that it does so regardless of marriage, and not because of it.

On the other hand, it is utterly false that love results from marriage. On rare occasions one does hear of a miraculous case of a married couple falling in love after marriage, but on close examination it will be found that it is a mere adjustment to the inevitable. Certainly the growing-used to each other is far away from the spontaneity, the intensity, and beauty of love, without which the intimacy of marriage must prove degrading to both the woman and the man.

Marriage is primarily an economic arrangement, an insurance pact. It differs from the ordinary life insurance agreement only in that it is more binding, more exacting. Its returns are insignificantly small compared with the investments. In taking out an insurance policy one pays for it in dollars and cents, always at liberty to discontinue payments. If, however, woman's premium is a husband, she pays for it

with her name, her privacy, her self-respect, her very life, "until death doth part." Moreover, the marriage insurance condemns her to life-long dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social. Man, too, pays his toll, but as his sphere is wider, marriage does not limit him as much as woman. He feels his chains more in an economic sense.

Thus Dante's motto over Inferno applies with equal force to marriage.

"Ye who enter here leave all hope behind."

That marriage is a failure none but the very stupid will deny. One has but to glance over the statistics of divorce to realize how bitter a failure marriage really is. Nor will the stereotyped Philistine argument that the laxity of divorce laws and the growing looseness of woman account for the fact that: first, every twelfth marriage ends in divorce; second, that since 1870 divorces have increased from 28 to 73 for every hundred thousand population; third, that adultery, since 1867, as ground for divorce, has increased 270.8 per cent.; fourth, that desertion increased 369.8 per cent.

Added to these startling figures is a vast amount of material, dramatic and literary, further elucidating this subject. Robert Herrick, in Together; Pinero, in Mid-Channel; Eugene Walter, in Paid in Full, and scores of other writers are discussing the barrenness, the monotony, the sordidness, the inadequacy of marriage as a factor for harmony and understanding.

The thoughtful social student will not content himself with the popular superficial excuse for this phenomenon. He will have to dig down deeper into the very life of the sexes to know why marriage proves so disastrous.

Edward Carpenter says that behind every marriage stands the life-long environment of the two sexes; an environment so different from each other that man and woman must remain strangers. Separated by an insurmountable wall of superstition, custom, and habit, marriage has not the potentiality of developing knowledge of, and respect for, each other, without which every union is doomed to failure.

Henrik Ibsen, the hater of all social shams, was probably the first to realize this great truth. Nora leaves her husband, not--as the stupid critic would have it--because she is tired of her responsibilities or feels the need of woman's rights, but because she has come to know that for eight years she had lived with a stranger and borne him children. Can there be anything more humiliating, more degrading than a life-long proximity between two strangers? No need for the woman to know anything of the man, save his income. As to the knowledge of the woman--what is there to know except that she has a pleasing appearance? We have not yet outgrown the theologic myth that woman has no soul, that she is a mere appendix to man, made out of his rib just for the convenience of the gentleman who was so strong that he was afraid of his own shadow.

Perchance the poor quality of the material whence woman comes is responsible for her inferiority. At any rate, woman has no soul--what is there to know about her? Besides, the less soul a woman has the greater her asset as a wife, the more readily will she absorb herself in her husband. It is this slavish acquiescence to man's superiority that has kept the marriage institution seemingly intact for so long a period. Now that woman is coming into her own, now that she is actually growing aware of herself as a being outside of the master's grace, the sacred institution of marriage is gradually being undermined, and no amount of sentimental lamentation can stay it.

From infancy, almost, the average girl is told that marriage is her ultimate goal; therefore her training and education must be directed towards that end. Like the mute beast fattened for slaughter, she is prepared for that. Yet, strange to say, she is allowed to know much less about her function as wife and mother than the ordinary artisan of his trade. It is indecent and filthy for a respectable girl to know anything of the marital relation. Oh, for the inconsistency of respectability, that needs the marriage vow to turn something which is filthy into the purest and most sacred arrangement that none dare question or criticize. Yet that is exactly the attitude of the average upholder of marriage. The prospective wife and mother is kept in complete ignorance of her only asset in the competitive field--sex. Thus she enters into life-long

relations with a man only to find herself shocked,
repelled, outraged
beyond measure by the most natural and healthy instinct,
sex. It is safe
to say that a large percentage of the unhappiness,
misery, distress, and
physical suffering of matrimony is due to the criminal
ignorance in sex
matters that is being extolled as a great virtue. Nor is
it at all an
exaggeration when I say that more than one home has been
broken up
because of this deplorable fact.

If, however, woman is free and big enough to learn the
mystery of sex
without the sanction of State or Church, she will stand
condemned as
utterly unfit to become the wife of a "good" man, his
goodness
consisting of an empty brain and plenty of money. Can
there be anything
more outrageous than the idea that a healthy, grown
woman, full of life
and passion, must deny nature's demand, must subdue her
most intense
craving, undermine her health and break her spirit, must
stunt her
vision, abstain from the depth and glory of sex
experience until a
"good" man comes along to take her unto himself as a
wife? That is
precisely what marriage means. How can such an
arrangement end except in
failure? This is one, though not the least important,
factor of
marriage, which differentiates it from love.

Ours is a practical age. The time when Romeo and Juliet
risked the wrath
of their fathers for love, when Gretchen exposed herself
to the gossip
of her neighbors for love, is no more. If, on rare
occasions, young

people allow themselves the luxury of romance, they are taken in care by the elders, drilled and pounded until they become "sensible."

The moral lesson instilled in the girl is not whether the man has aroused her love, but rather is it, "How much?" The important and only God of practical American life: Can the man make a living? can he support a wife? That is the only thing that justifies marriage. Gradually this saturates every thought of the girl; her dreams are not of moonlight and kisses, of laughter and tears; she dreams of shopping tours and bargain counters. This soul poverty and sordidness are the elements inherent in the marriage institution. The State and the Church approve of no other ideal, simply because it is the one that necessitates the State and Church control of men and women.

Doubtless there are people who continue to consider love above dollars and cents. Particularly is this true of that class whom economic necessity has forced to become self-supporting. The tremendous change in woman's position, wrought by that mighty factor, is indeed phenomenal when we reflect that it is but a short time since she has entered the industrial arena. Six million women wage workers; six million women, who have the equal right with men to be exploited, to be robbed, to go on strike; aye, to starve even. Anything more, my lord? Yes, six million wage workers in every walk of life, from the highest brain work to the mines and railroad tracks; yes, even detectives and

policemen. Surely
the emancipation is complete.

Yet with all that, but a very small number of the vast
army of women
wage workers look upon work as a permanent issue, in the
same light as
does man. No matter how decrepit the latter, he has been
taught to be
independent, self-supporting. Oh, I know that no one is
really
independent in our economic treadmill; still, the
poorest specimen of a
man hates to be a parasite; to be known as such, at any
rate.

The woman considers her position as worker transitory,
to be thrown
aside for the first bidder. That is why it is infinitely
harder to
organize women than men. "Why should I join a union? I
am going to get
married, to have a home." Has she not been taught from
infancy to look
upon that as her ultimate calling? She learns soon
enough that the home,
though not so large a prison as the factory, has more
solid doors and
bars. It has a keeper so faithful that naught can escape
him. The most
tragic part, however, is that the home no longer frees
her from wage
slavery; it only increases her task.

According to the latest statistics submitted before a
Committee "on
labor and wages, and congestion of population," ten per
cent. of the
wage workers in New York City alone are married, yet
they must continue
to work at the most poorly paid labor in the world. Add
to this horrible
aspect the drudgery of housework, and what remains of
the protection and
glory of the home? As a matter of fact, even the middle-

class girl in
marriage can not speak of her home, since it is the man
who creates her
sphere. It is not important whether the husband is a
brute or a
darling. What I wish to prove is that marriage
guarantees woman a home
only by the grace of her husband. There she moves about
in his home,
year after year, until her aspect of life and human
affairs becomes as
flat, narrow, and drab as her surroundings. Small wonder
if she becomes
a nag, petty, quarrelsome, gossipy, unbearable, thus
driving the man
from the house. She could not go, if she wanted to;
there is no place to
go. Besides, a short period of married life, of complete
surrender of
all faculties, absolutely incapacitates the average
woman for the
outside world. She becomes reckless in appearance,
clumsy in her
movements, dependent in her decisions, cowardly in her
judgment, a
weight and a bore, which most men grow to hate and
despise. Wonderfully
inspiring atmosphere for the bearing of life, is it not?

But the child, how is it to be protected, if not for
marriage? After
all, is not that the most important consideration? The
sham, the
hypocrisy of it! Marriage protecting the child, yet
thousands of
children destitute and homeless. Marriage protecting the
child, yet
orphan asylums and reformatories overcrowded, the
Society for the
Prevention of Cruelty to Children keeping busy in
rescuing the little
victims from "loving" parents, to place them under more
loving care, the
Gerry Society. Oh, the mockery of it!

Marriage may have the power to bring the horse to water,
but has it ever
made him drink? The law will place the father under
arrest, and put him
in convict's clothes; but has that ever stilled the
hunger of the child?
If the parent has no work, or if he hides his identity,
what does
marriage do then? It invokes the law to bring the man to
"justice," to
put him safely behind closed doors; his labor, however,
goes not to the
child, but to the State. The child receives but a
blighted memory of its
father's stripes.

As to the protection of the woman,--therein lies the
curse of marriage.
Not that it really protects her, but the very idea is so
revolting, such
an outrage and insult on life, so degrading to human
dignity, as to
forever condemn this parasitic institution.

It is like that other paternal arrangement--capitalism.
It robs man of
his birthright, stunts his growth, poisons his body,
keeps him in
ignorance, in poverty, and dependence, and then
institutes charities
that thrive on the last vestige of man's self-respect.

The institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman,
an absolute
dependent. It incapacitates her for life's struggle,
annihilates her
social consciousness, paralyzes her imagination, and
then imposes its
gracious protection, which is in reality a snare, a
travesty on human
character.

If motherhood is the highest fulfillment of woman's
nature, what other
protection does it need, save love and freedom? Marriage

but defiles,
outrages, and corrupts her fulfillment. Does it not say
to woman, Only
when you follow me shall you bring forth life? Does it
not condemn her
to the block, does it not degrade and shame her if she
refuses to buy
her right to motherhood by selling herself? Does not
marriage only
sanction motherhood, even though conceived in hatred, in
compulsion?
Yet, if motherhood be of free choice, of love, of
ecstasy, of defiant
passion, does it not place a crown of thorns upon an
innocent head and
carve in letters of blood the hideous epithet, Bastard?
Were marriage to
contain all the virtues claimed for it, its crimes
against motherhood
would exclude it forever from the realm of love.

Love, the strongest and deepest element in all life, the
harbinger of
hope, of joy, of ecstasy; love, the defier of all laws,
of all
conventions; love, the freest, the most powerful moulder
of human
destiny; how can such an all-compelling force be
synonymous with that
poor little State and Church-begotten weed, marriage?

Free love? As if love is anything but free! Man has
bought brains, but
all the millions in the world have failed to buy love.
Man has subdued
bodies, but all the power on earth has been unable to
subdue love. Man
has conquered whole nations, but all his armies could
not conquer love.
Man has chained and fettered the spirit, but he has been
utterly
helpless before love. High on a throne, with all the
splendor and pomp

his gold can command, man is yet poor and desolate, if
love passes him
by. And if it stays, the poorest hovel is radiant with
warmth, with life
and color. Thus love has the magic power to make of a
beggar a king.
Yes, love is free; it can dwell in no other atmosphere.
In freedom it
gives itself unreservedly, abundantly, completely. All
the laws on the
statutes, all the courts in the universe, cannot tear it
from the soil,
once love has taken root. If, however, the soil is
sterile, how can
marriage make it bear fruit? It is like the last
desperate struggle of
fleeting life against death.

Love needs no protection; it is its own protection. So
long as love
begets life no child is deserted, or hungry, or famished
for the want of
affection. I know this to be true. I know women who
became mothers in
freedom by the men they loved. Few children in wedlock
enjoy the care,
the protection, the devotion free motherhood is capable
of bestowing.

The defenders of authority dread the advent of a free
motherhood, lest
it will rob them of their prey. Who would fight wars?
Who would create
wealth? Who would make the policeman, the jailer, if
woman were to
refuse the indiscriminate breeding of children? The
race, the race!
shouts the king, the president, the capitalist, the
priest. The race
must be preserved, though woman be degraded to a mere
machine,--and the
marriage institution is our only safety valve against
the pernicious sex
awakening of woman. But in vain these frantic efforts to

maintain a
state of bondage. In vain, too, the edicts of the
Church, the mad
attacks of rulers, in vain even the arm of the law.
Woman no longer
wants to be a party to the production of a race of
sickly, feeble,
decrepit, wretched human beings, who have neither the
strength nor moral
courage to throw off the yoke of poverty and slavery.
Instead she
desires fewer and better children, begotten and reared
in love and
through free choice; not by compulsion, as marriage
imposes. Our
pseudo-moralists have yet to learn the deep sense of
responsibility
toward the child, that love in freedom has awakened in
the breast of
woman. Rather would she forego forever the glory of
motherhood than
bring forth life in an atmosphere that breathes only
destruction and
death. And if she does become a mother, it is to give to
the child the
deepest and best her being can yield. To grow with the
child is her
motto; she knows that in that manner alone can she help
build true
manhood and womanhood.

Ibsen must have had a vision of a free mother, when,
with a master
stroke, he portrayed Mrs. Alving. She was the ideal
mother because she
had outgrown marriage and all its horrors, because she
had broken her
chains, and set her spirit free to soar until it
returned a personality,
regenerated and strong. Alas, it was too late to rescue
her life's joy,
her Oswald; but not too late to realize that love in
freedom is the only
condition of a beautiful life. Those who, like Mrs.

Alving, have paid
with blood and tears for their spiritual awakening,
repudiate marriage
as an imposition, a shallow, empty mockery. They know,
whether love last
but one brief span of time or for eternity, it is the
only creative,
inspiring, elevating basis for a new race, a new world.

In our present pygmy state love is indeed a stranger to
most people.
Misunderstood and shunned, it rarely takes root; or if
it does, it soon
withers and dies. Its delicate fiber can not endure the
stress and
strain of the daily grind. Its soul is too complex to
adjust itself to
the slimy woof of our social fabric. It weeps and moans
and suffers with
those who have need of it, yet lack the capacity to rise
to love's
summit.

Some day, some day men and women will rise, they will
reach the mountain
peak, they will meet big and strong and free, ready to
receive, to
partake, and to bask in the golden rays of love. What
fancy, what
imagination, what poetic genius can foresee even
approximately the
potentialities of such a force in the life of men and
women. If the
world is ever to give birth to true companionship and
oneness, not
marriage, but love will be the parent.