Woman's Tolerance of Woman

Her Changed Attitude Toward the "Bad" Woman

By R. le Clerc Phillips

Probably no one denies that there has arisen among women a new spirit of tolerance. Tolerance for that ethical ideal which they have always been expected to treat with intolerance. I mean of course the question of what is generally known as immorality. And one student of society at least, Mr. Bertrand Russell, in a recent book has actually gone so far as to declare that the emancipated woman of to-day has shown so slight a disposition to bolster up the institution of marriage that there is some possibility that it may ultimately disappear altogether.

The new toleration among women is coincident with their recent economic independence and with the spirit of unrest in marriage which is to many so disquieting a feature of modern life. All three are closely interrelated and hinge one upon the other. It has so constantly been stated that the influence of women is and must always be in favor of the preservation of marriage and of family life that the mere repetition of the statement has apparently created a universal belief in its veracity.

But so far from women having used their comparatively recent-acquired powers for the strengthening of the married state and the furtherance of conventional morality, their emancipation has beyond all question been used by them in precisely the opposite sense. Social reformers and ministers of religion are well aware of this and of recent years have indulged in an orgy of nagging, blaming women entirely for the real epidemic of divorces and separations which is one of the most striking features of modern life.

Divorce, as every one knows, is enormously on the increase in the majority of civilized countries; certainly in all those countries characterized as progressive. And in the United States the increase has been immeasurably greater than anywhere else. Seeing that women occupy a better, freer, and more dignified position here than elsewhere, it is impossible to avoid linking the divorce phenomenon of this country with the large emancipation of American women. In 1922 there were 148,815 divorces in the United States; in 1916 there were 112,036; in 1906 there were 72,062; and in 1896 there were only 42,937. That is to say that in the extremely short period of twenty-six years there has been an increase of 105,878 divorces over the figure of 1896. According to the latest government statistics, in this country one marriage out of every seven ends in the divorce courts. In

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England there were 3464 divorces in 1921 as compared with only 1348 in 1914, the increase being largely due to extraordinary marriages which took place during the war. The latest available figures for both France and Germany are staggering by the side of the relatively modest English figures. In 1922 there were 33,000 divorces in France, and in 1921 Germany brought her total up to 39,216.

As to the striking increase in the economic emancipation of women, it is sufficient for the purpose of this article to mention that while in 1880 there were 2,647,157 women gainfully employed in the United States, in 1920 the figure had risen to 8,549,511, or sixteen per cent of the total population of the country. The number of married women gainfully employed was 1,920,281 in 1920; but in 1890 the number was no higher than 515,260—a really sensational increase for a period of only thirty years.

The attitude of the feminists toward the economic emancipation of women has always been one of the noisiest kind of approval. And small wonder. For judged from the point of view of the individual woman, and from this point of view only—for I have no intention of discussing the question from the point of view of the race or the family, and certainly not from that of man—nothing could conceivably have done more to enable women to flout custom, convention, and even morality with such perfect impunity than the power of earning their own bread.

Wherever and whenever women have been able to fend for themselves it has been usual for them to make their own laws of living. This truth has been evident throughout history, and explains the tolerant attitude which has always been extended to the unconventionalities of actresses, dancers, and women of great wealth. Being economically independent of men they have not been forced to do the bidding of any man—except by choice; and the only really infallible whip that men have ever possessed to command women to their will has been that of women's economic dependence on the male.

§ 2

It is possible that few men realized at the time of the inception of the feminist movement that once women no longer depended on fathers, husbands, or male relatives for their food, shelter, and clothes, the hold over them was at an end except in so far as women wished men to retain it. Sir J. M. Barrie made this very clear in his famous little play, "The Twelve Pound Look."

It is probable too that if men had thought about it at all before women launched themselves on their triumphant series of emancipations, it would scarcely have occurred to men that their domination over women would ever have been questioned by women to the extent that it actually has been questioned—and resented. Men have naturally accepted this domination as a fact of nature, and no doubt they have been deeply disappointed that of recent years women have to a limited degree not only denied it but have occasionally even succeeded in disproving it, since it is absurd to think that a man can dominate any woman who earns more than himself.

The feminists, in the days of the heat of the struggle, never greatly stressed this aspect of the results of the economic emancipation of women,

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therein giving proof of considerable tact. It would not have helped matters if they had taken pains to warn men that the economic independence of women could be utilized, and since has been, as a weapon of attack and defense in marriage. Their arguments were as superficially sentimental as a short story in a woman's magazine. Marriage, they said, has hitherto been virtually the only means of livelihood open to women; and women have thus been forced to adopt it for a living just as men have been obliged to study law, medicine, or engineering, or go into business for a living.

The result of this iniquitous state of affairs has been that while men as a rule marry for romantic reasons, women have not always reciprocated in this respect, but have only too frequently married for purely mercenary motives. This, the feminists have always pointed out, is a grave injustice to men, which can be removed only by allowing women an alternative means of earning their living.

So far this is admirable reasoning, and its truth is irrefutable. But the feminists have seldom carried their arguments beyond the point of the marriage ceremony. They have never dwelt too long on the fact that the same economic independence which enables a woman to marry a man for love instead of for a meal-ticket also enables her, when out of love, to put on her hat and, like Nora Helmer in "A Doll's House," walk out of her home, slamming the door behind her. In other words, the ability to earn thirty-five dollars a week—the earning-capacity of a very large number of women in this country—has placed in the hands of women a weapon of deadly effectiveness.

The mere knowledge of their competence to shift for themselves has had the perfectly natural result of making married women less tolerant of restraint, less willing to give as well as to take, more imperious, more exacting, more capricious. This spirit, in turn, has had and is having a marked influence on the increase in divorce. It is clear that the married woman who is unable to fend for herself economically must, and of necessity does, submit to various trials to which another woman, capable of earning her own living, will not submit. It is to be feared that the virtues of resignation, self-sacrifice, and womanly duty which the moralists advocate in cases of unhappy marriages are apt to receive but scant attention from a woman who believes herself to be the victim of outrageous marriage conditions and knows herself to be fully capable of earning a decent livelihood for herself.

"Women," said Mr. Justice Darling, the famous English judge, in a post-war newspaper interview, "differ by the width of Heaven from what their mothers were." But do they? Is it not the circumstances under which women live to-day that are so radically different from those which governed the lives of their mothers? The women of the past generation when compared with their daughters may seem to be paragons of virtue; but those who uphold them at the expense of the modern woman may forget that the womanly virtues, the decay of which they so deeply regret, were as often as not only the result of women's inability to adopt any line of conduct except that of submission in marriage. The modern woman fails lamentably in the matter of submissiveness for the reason that it has dawned on her that

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there is no need to submit to any man or any thing so long as she can earn thirty-five or forty dollars a week.

Nothing better exemplifies this modern lack of submission on the part of women to the trials and tribulations incident to married life than an observation made by the U. S. Bureau of the Census in a publication entitled "Marriage and Divorce, 1922": "There appears to have been a large increase in 1922 over the period 1887 to 1906 in the proportion of divorces where the marriages had endured 'Less than one year,' 'one year,' 'two years,' and 'three years.' *There were, in fact, no less than 6,445 marriages in this country in 1922 which failed to last even so short a period as one year.*" (The italics are mine.)

Although, of course, women were not the petitioners in all of these cases, in view of the fact that between 1887 and 1922 rather over two thirds of the divorce applications have been made by the wife and rather less than one third by the husband, it is fair to assume that far the larger part of these short-lived marriages were dissolved on the application of the bride. Surely this is eloquent proof, if any were needed, of the immensely powerful weapon that woman has made of her newly won economic independence.

§ 3

But if the economic emancipation of women has been the chief factor in the creation of marriage unrest, it has a very close second in the rapidly changing attitude of woman toward the morality of her sex. Some few years before the war, Mrs. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the well known English suffragist leader, wrote that she saw distinct signs of a movement toward a single standard of morality as between the sexes, but that this was being reached, not by any elevation of the man's standard to meet the woman's, but by a lowering of the woman's to meet the man's. Since those words were written the World War has taken place; and in the general upheaval that followed, it became apparent that the old hostility of the "good" woman toward those of her sex whose morality is unconventional has been so greatly mitigated as to be in some cases almost non-existent. Even a few dignitaries of the Episcopal Church seem to have recognized this new spirit, for one of the speakers at the recent convention in New Orleans alluded in the same breath to the growing independence of women and the progress of the idea of an equal standard of morals.

My own friends are virtually all women who are no longer quite young. Some are married and some are single and many of them are very highly educated. Without exception their early environment has been that of rigid conventional morality. But strict as their own personal conduct may be, I do not know one woman—no, not one—who harbors harsh, contemptuous, or resentful feelings toward those women whose moral conduct is not so exemplary as their own. I think that this immense change in the attitude of the modern woman toward what has hitherto been called immorality is one of the most striking features of modern life; and it certainly has an important bearing on the divorce question in that a divorced woman is no longer regarded as a permanent outcast from society, even when her guilt is a matter of common knowledge. One powerful incentive to submission to the conditions of a

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loveless marriage is thus virtually wiped away for the woman who decides to disregard her marriage vows.

What is the real cause of this immense change in the attitude of women toward the question of immorality? I have mentioned the general upheaval provoked by the war, but this would not be sufficient of itself; the acceptance of new ideas must necessarily rest on their capacity for being carried out in practice. There would be little except futility in the determination of women, or at least of a certain proportion of emancipated women, to adopt a single standard of morality if they did not possess the power of sustaining their actions. And in the same way, the new tolerance of women toward women rests on a basis of solid economics.

It has frequently been remarked by sociologists that the ancient hostility of "good" women toward women of unconventional morals is based on the fact that the "bad" women are "scabs." That is to say that from time immemorial women have made it their business to insist on a life contract with men—marriage. They could hardly have done otherwise, since no means of earning their own bread was open to them; while to any but the women of exceptional beauty or charm, who constitute an infinitesimal proportion of the female sex, the outlook resulting from short-time contracts would be exceedingly precarious. The average woman has not usually been able ever to depend on unlimited offers of maintenance on the part of men. A life contract is therefore virtually essential to the average woman, handicapped, as such a woman always has been up to the last few years, by absolute economic dependence.

Consequently it was the most natural thing in the world that women who held out, so to speak, for trade-union regulations should regard as "scabs" those women who were ready to "work" for less than these regulations insisted on. The resentment that the "good" women felt against the "bad" was therefore precisely of the same character that the workman, struggling to keep up his price of labor, experiences against the man who is ready to undercut him. The industrial "scab," by refusing to subscribe to trade-union rules, is helping to make life more difficult for the ordinary workman; the sex "scab" has been doing the same thing to the ordinary woman whose sole livelihood has hitherto been marriage.

As we have seen, marriage is no longer the sole means of livelihood for women. There are a hundred other means. As a consequence the sex "scab" and her operations have become far less deadly to the "good" woman. The sex "scab" may do her worst to-day; and although she may, with this worst, deprive the "good" woman of marriage, she cannot, thank Heaven, deprive her of her bread and butter, for the two things are no longer interdependent. Consequently there is no longer the same reason for hostility on the part of the "good" woman. The fear that the sex "scab" inspires to-day is only the tenth part of what it once was.

Naturally women have never chosen to cry their fear of the "scab" from the housetops. To have done so would have plunged them still more deeply into the morass of men's domination, for it is only human to take advantage of the fears of those in our power. Instead they combined in a mighty

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organization to retaliate on the sex "scab" by the most perfectly elaborated system of social ostracism that the world has ever known. Individually the sex "scabs" have always wielded immense power; but *en masse* they were totally unable to cope with the endless battalions of plain, ordinary, average women who formed the great women's trade-union, with "Marriage a life contract" as their rallying-cry.

And out of this perfectly organized and artificial system of social ostracism there gradually arose an attitude of genuine hostility and contempt for those women who were willing to take less than a life contract—an attitude which men did not share but to which they subscribed with lip-service in order to preserve some semblance of peace within the portals of the home.

What is to be done to check this new tolerance of women—always supposing that the body of opinion which objects to it becomes strong enough to create a demand for its suppression? Frankly I do not know. If women were deprived of their economic independence they would automatically revert to the old order of things; at least, presumably they would. But even if it were possible to force them back into dependence, one imagines that most men would make a wry face over the prospect of contributing to the support of female relatives who had failed to find husbands to support them. Of course the tolerance of women might be countered by a still newer intolerance of men; that is to say, by the institution of a complete reversal of the old order of attitudes toward immorality. But, for obvious reasons, the point is not worth ten seconds' discussion.

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Reading for Education

When Sophistication Muddies the Waters

By Hugh Walpole

Of all the snobberies common to man the literary variation is, I think, the least harmful. That is because I suppose it is really based on a love of beautiful things, yet a great many very fine and handsome readers are quite innocent of it. I divided in my first essay nursery readers into the two grand divisions of Romantics and Realists, and now the time has come for a later division into the two great nationalities of the Sophisticated and the Unsophisticated, and one of the principal characteristics of the Sophisticated is that they have been all at one time or other literary snobs.

I like to think of the Unsophisticated; charming and happy creatures, they are seeking only to gratify their simple and sensuous emotions, passing from the twopence colored pamphlets to the swashbuckling romances of the great Dumas or the happy family chronicles of the author of "The Heir of Redcliffe" or the poetry of Mrs. Hemans, Longfellow, and Sir Edwin Arnold to the mature uncritical happiness of anything that seems to them real and true and beautiful. It is the fashion in the more superior literary journals of our time to sneer at the Unsophisticated; almost nothing is done for their reading by these journals. Because they are moved by Longfellow as well as by Tennyson, by Mrs. Humphry Ward equally with Jane Austen, by the latest successful novel of the day and by Mr. De La Mare's fairy-stories at one and the same time, therefore little articles are written making fun of them, sarcastic poems are composed in their honor by very clever young poets, and the true love of literature is said to be quite beyond their experience.

But is it? Because the Unsophisticated have never considered whether their reading is good form or no is merely an argument in favor of their honesty; the Unsophisticated indeed have no opportunity of being anything but honest. There are times perhaps when they are shy of their appreciations, when some very clever relative has raised an eyebrow at their enthusiasms or some young critic has been entertained at dinner and has written to them with that superior tolerance that is so natural an attitude for young critics. They blush then a little, they hedge a trifle perhaps, they try hurriedly to summon to their memories any works with fine-sounding titles that have given them pleasure, but their innocent attempts at such snobbery are happily short-lived, their true enthusiasms will keep breaking

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