

Choosing a Husband.

BY ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

THAT wise man, Solomon, the Sardanapalus of the Jews, has said: "Every wise woman buildeth her house."

Were that most profound and significant aphorism the product of our own times, it would be regarded with some distrust, as emanating from the "strong-minded," possibly; but, being some thousands of years old, and hoary with the dust and dignity of centuries, it has been and will be regarded as soundly orthodox; therefore, in the process of building the house, and laying the foundation for the little republic of home, it will be proper to rank the woman first, as she is to figure largely there, not only in dignity, but as the especial agent for all that is cheering, orderly, and esthetic in the household.

Hitherto, in the history of the world, her position has been far more passive, far more that of mere negation, than it promises to be in the future. She has been conceded the right to *reject*, and not granted the right to *choose*; and this has been the foundation for a vast deal of misapprehension and antagonism, to say nothing of the corruption and misery which it indirectly involves.

The sexes are fully equal in intellect, in moral sense, and even in physique (admitting that women were designed to be more delicately organized), taking the stand-point from the best models, which is the true criterion, all others being exceptional—therefore there is a propriety in admitting that a woman has a right to choose her husband, just as much so as for a man to choose a wife; and the only pretext for denying this is based upon the inferior one of sex only.

In saying this I shall have the whole innumerable army of romance writers and readers, as well as the imbeciles of both sexes, crying out against me; nevertheless, I stand to the point, and nail my colors to the mast in defense of it—that it is right, proper, and delicate for a woman to choose her husband; and the man thus distinguished by her choice will feel himself ennobled and sanctified, and will regard such a woman with tenfold tenderness and reverence. It has been asserted for ages that the woman must be wooed,

"And, not *unsought*, be won."

Leave an engaging woman or a pretty girl alone as far as that is concerned; such are

likely to be sought after quite to their hearts' content, and quite to their discomfort, also, if they have any grains of nobleness in their composition.

I am by no means willing to have it understood that I counsel women to go about "popping the question" to men here and there like an army of grenadiers; far from it. A man rarely "pops the question" till he is pretty well assured in his own mind as to the kind of response he will receive; and in all cases a refined woman prevents a lover from explaining himself where she is bent upon a denial of his suit.

In any true relation there is very little of this question and answer form so much talked about, and is to all that wearing of a perpetual "mask" upon the face, in the shape of concealed emotions; and that resolve to die rather than expose the story of the heart is all nonsense, very little of it occurs in real life. True-hearted men and women are easier read than our romance writers seem to comprehend.

Even Shakspeare's beautiful passage, so often quoted,

"She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm in th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek; she pined in thought,
And, with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat, like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at Grief,"

is put into the mouth of the disguised bride, who thus tells the secret of her own love to her false and capricious lover. Ever since, and probably as far back as the first days of chivalry—that age of heroic and generous men and soft, devoted women; an age fruitful, also, in shams and affectations—it has been the acknowledged gospel in all affairs of the heart, that a woman must hide her emotions under double lock and key, or, in familiar language, "grin and bear it," unless her to-be lord and master says first: "I love you."

Literature is full of heroines who are practicing after the fashion of the renowned Spartan boy, and we follow them through innumerable pages of vapid sentiment, where they are living and acting myriads of lies, in order to uphold a theory false in fact and false to nature.

The two sexes are one in a scientific point of view, and there is no merit in a woman who lays her heart on the altar of pride merely for the sake of pride. It is no worse for a woman to be rejected than for a man to be so; if men and women were high and true they would each

regard the other in so pure, so holy a light that these goings forth of the heart would be too sacred ever to be revealed; they would be too solemn for jest, too deeply real for gossip. They would be laid away, shrouded like many a human hope, dead but beautiful, in the lone chambers of the soul, to be locked upon reverently just as so many of us garner in some secret receptacle a leaf, a bud, a lock of hair whose history is known only to us and the angels.

Let our women be free not only to reject, but to choose, also. Men and women are likely to do this without any great expenditure of language, for the vocabulary of love is more expressive than words.

I have known several women of refinement and intellect who owned that their husbands were rather sought after by them than otherwise, and these matches were certainly among the happiest I have ever known. Perhaps, if a woman deludes a man in this way into marriage, she feels bound to make his condition a happy one.

When I was a child, one of my mother's friends was a tall, very reverend, but most elegant woman, who rarely went from home, and was far from entertaining company there, as was the custom in that part of hospitable New England. She belonged to the highest rank in point of wealth and birth, was handsome and highly intellectual, and yet, with all these advantages, she wrecked more than one life for lack of nerve to go through with what she began in fine spirit.

There were two brothers in the same town in which she lived, very different in character, and inferior to herself in rank, but both very estimable men. The elder was plain, plodding, dull, and pains-taking, but an honest and church-going man, whom no one could say a word against, nor would they go out of the way to praise. His name was William. Now this worthy man had hardly ever appeared in any society, till his brother George, who was in the Navy, came home on a long furlough.

George had the peculiar dash inseparable from the Navy—was manly, generous, brave, and accomplished. He might not have been a model man, as dull people accounted his brother, but he was above censure or reproach of any kind, and the lady of whom I speak at first admired and then loved him. She had good reason for believing the sentiment to be mutual; but, as her family was rich, haughty, and exclusive, she was well convinced that *he* would

not dare make any advances, and she resolved, being old enough to have a right to think for herself, to write him in a way not to be misunderstood.

Accordingly she did so; but, unfortunately, she had been misinformed as to the name of her lover, and addressed her letter to William instead of George. Nothing could exceed the surprise and delight of the little man upon receiving this letter. He prepared himself in the most seductive manner to call upon the lady, letter in hand.

She was aghast! Recovering herself as best she could, she faltered out:

"Your name is William, then?"

The poor innocent was *not* penetrating. He was full of unexpected rapture, and she—she, too proud to explain—caught, as she believed, in the snare of her own folly, forbore to do so. She married him.

George, indignant, and yet more in sorrow than in anger, joined his ship, and never saw her again. He perished at sea.

The lady took up her self-imposed burden with a strong, brave spirit. She made poor William a faithful, dutiful, but certainly rather haughty wife, whom he never ceased to admire and boast about. She kept her secret buried in her own breast till he had gone the way of all the earth, and then, finding her own end approaching, she revealed it, in a fit of weak confidence to her eldest daughter.

Now here was a woman *living* a life-long lie, but incapable of *dying* with it upon her conscience. How much nobler, how much better worthy of a true woman it had been, to have owned to the truth bravely, and so abide the issue?

I shall say nothing of those monstrous marriages of interest and convenience with which the world abounds, because they are as degrading to a woman as any and every sale of her person must and will be, and they are utterly inconsistent with the spirit of all truth and religion. They are an outrage to the holiness of womanhood—a shame to the soul of manhood.

In choosing a husband, it is easier to say what a woman should not choose than to say what she should; for the best must and will depend upon characteristics well known to herself. If she is a strong woman she may venture to marry a weak man; but if weak herself, let her beware of this, for she will put her own life out at last, and ten to one do the same ungracious office for her husband; while a woman of nobler proportions will be more fer-

bearing, and make up, also, for some of his deficiencies.

Let not any woman marry a man with insane blood in his veins.

Let her not marry one deformed at birth; the disasters and accidental destruction of any members by war or otherwise, may excite her compassion and be no impediment to deep affection, but a congenital defect becomes hereditary, and by the laws of our being will be repugnant to a wholesome-minded woman.

She can not and will not marry a drunkard.

She should not marry a diseased, sickly man.

Neither will a wise woman marry an old man; for the true idea of marriage is the union of youth, and health, and beauty; a thorough completeness of spiritual, mental, and physical life, and every thing short of this is all but nauseous to a sympathetic, penetrative mind, as a violation of immutable laws.

She will not marry a man younger than herself, not simply for the reason so often advanced, that a woman grows old sooner than a man, which is true only because of the abuses of society; for a woman of sound health and cheerful mind, unswayed by the vulgar and wicked passions of envy, jealousy, and malice, carries in her own breast a fountain of perpetual youth and beauty. Let her be temperate in all things; preserve her person fresh as a rose; her mind undwarfed by prejudice or idleness; her soul, with all its affections and impulses, pure and loving, and she may go onward to her eighty, ninety, or a hundred years, generally beautiful to the last, fit for reverence and for admiration, and worthy to sit for one of Michael Angelo's Sibyls.

Moral obliquities of many kinds are so intangible that, unless carried to that excess which shows the best part of manhood utterly corrupt and depraved, a woman is not likely to know of them, and she should be unwilling to listen to common scandal; she must not trust to any spy or informer, but rely upon his truth and her own intuitions.

If she expects to find Chevalier Bayards, and Admirable Crichtons, and immaculate Josephs ready for her asking, she will most likely remain without a husband. She can only hope for an approximation to the ideal; but if she is true-hearted, sincere to the core, unselfish and lovely in her own life, she will be sure to make the dear one whom she allows to be head of the republic of home not only a happy man, but a progressively good man, growing into spiritual insight, advancing in dignity and manly worth,

for she will be his help-met in building this house.

This is plain talk, but the subject demands it, and the world is altogether too squeamish in regard to it, and so madness, deformity, drunkenness, and disease go on accumulating, with all their mental, and moral, and physical obliquities, till the earth is a lazar house and pestilent with crime.

This is, much of it, due to that false estimate of women in the world which regards her almost exclusively in the nature of sex, instead of as God's best and purest gift to man, to be his help, his comfort, and his inspiration.

It is the woman who builds the house, and therefore she should take heed how she builds. When the world grows wiser, it will accept her in her higher aspect of wisdom and forecast—moving like a queen in the midst of her household, her husband known in the gates where he sitteth with the elders, known as the husband honored, beloved, and exalted by a wife whose price is above rubies.

In the time to come it will be enough to cause the cheek to tingle with shame to see a discordant marriage; for then women will choose as well as be chosen, and she will not lend herself to any relation other than the true and the holy, and man will find his manhood augmented by marriage and the beautiful and holy relations which it involves.

When woman shall choose a husband, not from interest, caprice, or vanity, but impelled by a divine, pure, loving instinct, men will be ashamed of their vices, and will then learn a true, manly reverence for women, and learn to feel more deeply the sanctities of the household.

In conclusion, I think any woman will not marry before she is twenty, for by so doing she loses that fresh, joyous, hopeful period of life, and a very essential part of it for the sake of health, study, and consolidation of character—her girlhood; and she will in after life be sure to mourn the loss of this lovely period. She will be twenty at the very least when she marries, and, like a true woman, she will look for a right manly man, who will be handsome in her eyes, and represent as nearly as possible her ideas of masculine perfection—good sense, mental, moral, and physical health; and, above all, a certain fore-rest and protectiveness, always attractive in the eyes of a woman.

THE man who has nothing to boast of but his illustrious ancestry is like a potato—the only good belonging to him is underground.