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UNWILLING MATERNITY.

BY ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

GEORGE ELIOT is at considerable pains to describe a character of whom one of the strongest experiences in her life may be designated as above. She limns this individual with touch after touch, that shall give it force and coherence. It is the mother of Daniel Deronda, who, with proclivities to art, is unwilling to be subjected to the marriage bond and its consequences. She marries at length a man whom she feels she can rule, that she may escape from the thralldom of her own family. She becomes the mother of an unloved child, from whom she separates herself while he is an infant, because he needs affection which she cannot give, and he is a hindrance and obstruction in that artistic sphere in which she moves, contented in heart and triumphant in ambition.

Thus much. Now this character, which strikes the domestic, maternal woman as a monstrous delineation, is by no means without its parallel in the woman of to-day. Indeed there is a vast number of the sex whose womanhood is so crudely developed, that, after assuming the marriage relation, and without any high mental or artistic tendencies, they still have an insurmountable repugnance to maternity. She may have married the man of her choicé, and yet does not delight

“To look as ladies like to be, who love their lords.”

She is loath to yield that highest testimony to her affections, and surest guarantee of her fidelity to the man whose name she is willing to bear, and whose fortune she divides. Now this seems to me an absolute meanness on her part, if not a fraud. A well constituted pair, desiring the full companionship implied in the relation of marriage, naturally desires paternity. It is the ultimate of the condition, and involves the comfort and security, the tenderness, the sacredness, and all the manifold amenities and delights of a household. It invests the pair with perennial youth. Health, gladness, responsibility enhance the dignities that pertain to life, and which augment as it advances—till the white head becomes surrounded by an aureola, and the children arise and call them blessed. Yea, he is honored in the gates where he sits with the elders of the city. Thus, in speaking of a pure, uncontaminated marriage, we naturally speak in the figurative language of scripture, than which nothing better can be found.

Where no children crown the ordinance of marriage, disagreeable, often wicked suspicions arise in regard to the couple; certain it is they are bereft of that which imparts fullness and handsomeness to the relation. They seem to outsiders mismatched and pitiful; and every well-wisher at once

suggests that they should adopt children from some favored pair whose quiver is full of them. The object of marriage is defeated in a childless union.

Men more frequently marry with this object in view than women, because the squeamishness and false modesty of the sex, superadded to the foolish teachings of our literature, have combined to give the latter an idea that it is indelicate to talk about it. George Eliot makes the young, worldly Gwendolen say to herself, as excuse for the wrong step she is about to take by her marriage with a man who has already five children and their injured mother to think about: "Perhaps we shall have no children," thus squarely facing the subject.

Many a man has an indescribable longing for paternity, and he will make great sacrifices that he may set up the family altar and hear the patter of little feet in his household, and no woman has a right to become the wife of such a one and be unwilling to become a mother. It is a mean, unwomanly quality of mind that underlies this unwillingness. The father of a family, Lord Bacon says, has given hostages to society, and he is a better man, or likely to be in every way a better man, because of this tender relation. His sense of responsibility is deepened, his natural love of protectiveness augmented, and he has a more realizing nearness to the infinite Father, as he reverently utters "Our Father who art in Heaven," for his own paternity expands to a divine Fatherhood.

The mother is no less elevated in the scale of womanhood by her maternity. The beautiful submissiveness of the mother of Jesus to her destiny, which the old painters symbolized by the folded hands of the Virgin over her breast, may be realized by the unselfish, pure-minded wife. She is invested by her conception with a divine sacredness; and she, by uniting her life with one man, has nothing more to do with the exciting pleasures and uncurbed imaginings of the worldling. Her husband may prove infirm of manhood, frivolous, or evil-doing; that does not exonerate her from the solemn

and sacred duties that hem her in by her state of motherhood.

For what reason do men and women form this relation, sanctioned by the Church, and recognized by the laws of all civilized communities? No one, not the coarsest of mind, will refer it to an animal status; few will explain it by a desire to live, or board together; fewer still to the comfort on one side of having a permanent escort when traveling or going out, and on the other by the convenience of having buttons sewed on, and the place taken care of. The thrifty will say that two will live cheaper than one, on the ground that the wife divides the toil and knows how to economize.

These are all outside reasons, none of which alone justifies the relation. Most of these conditions can be met by the ordinary methods of compensation, while marriage presupposes something more intimate and sacred than is to be found in these views of the question. If it is not accepted from an interior, sacred recognition of obligations to be incurred, marriage becomes no better than any other commercial contract, and assumes an indecency even. Sterne has said, with more fitness to truth than delicacy of expression: "The only motive that can justify marriage to a woman is the desire for children, and how any one such, past that period can ask the blessing of God upon her concupiscence, is beyond my comprehension."

This is coarsely put, but the truth is there. Women of culture, of a full, perfected organization, do not scruple to admit this desire, so needful to the race, and which may thus be made by marriage so helpful to good morals. This desire alone takes away the grossness of a willingness to form a relation with the other sex, and crowns marriage as something holy and beneficent, as well as becoming to rational beings. It is well known that Margaret Fuller never scrupled to express an ardent desire for motherhood, and the crowning and indorsement of her marriage by the consummated child, was welcomed by her with the most profound satisfaction and

thankfulness. Her whole being was permeated, as by a divine, spiritual blessedness. This is no merely ideal state, which only a remarkable woman may be supposed to feel; it is the natural instinct of a pure woman, and it ceases to be a part of the natural requirements of her organization only when worldliness, selfishness, or depravity have done their work of corrupting her.

In the early experience of our country a woman would have blushed with shame at any imputed unwillingness on her part to become a mother. She had not been demoralized by false opinions, nor enfeebled by sentimental reading, and knew nothing of the evil practices of our times. Bright and active, rational and cheery, year by year the olive branches multiplied around her table, and the good "minister" christened the gathering babies with becoming praise of the orderly household. Fathers stood amid their children with a patriarchal grace, for the language of discontent, and mawksh complaint was unheard in their households. Ten and twelve was but an ordinary number of the children, and the grand, stately mother of John and Charles Wesley counted to herself nineteen. Mrs. Somerville, the peer of Laplace, numbered twelve, I think, it may be thirteen, while Elizabeth Fry was the mother of an equally well filled quiver. Napoleon, willing to rebuke the pretensions of Madame De Stael to greatness, and show her that her one child by no means came up to the standard by which he judged a woman, replied to her question, "Who is the greatest woman?" by saying, "She who has borne the most children."

A statue has been raised by the Netherlanders in honor of a woman who mothered upwards of 30, and a well known mistress of an eating house in New York city, fresh, fair, and 40 or more, full of a genial activity, has given her country 25 healthful men and women.

Profound acquirements, the engrossments of public benefactions, and the activities of pursuits of any kind, have not been any hinderance to the natural instinct of maternity in women of

large capacities and high moral discernment. They were wives, and the aspect of motherdom was the obvious consequence. The one picture of the Roman matron receiving her fashionable friend amid the sanctities of her household, and when asked to show the lady her jewels, bringing forward her sons as her jewels, is full of suggestive sweetness. The commendation which this woman has received upon the page of history, demonstrates that the universal sentiment of mankind is in accordance with the dignified simplicity of wife and mother thus presented to view. Who can calculate the amount of elevation that might dawn upon the race if the majorities of the sex were akin in character to this Roman Cornelia.

It is altogether natural that a woman should desire to prolong the period of girlhood, that most lovely frontier of womanhood, graced by the innocence of the child, and the bloom of youth; but when she begins to be called an old girl, or as the Irish suggestively style it a "stale girl" it is better for her to assume the matronly robe, as affording her not only the best prospect of happiness, but of position also. Some women I have known to defer their marriage from year to year, even when affianced to the man of all others most desired as the future husband, simply because of this repugnance to child-bearing. I will cite a case that came under my own observation. Miss A. had been for 10 years engaged to her lover, and all that time no obstacle had intervened to postpone a union every way acceptable to their friends. Their devoted attachment to each other was well known and much admired, and the gentleman was sometimes blamed for deferring the marriage, as some thought because of pecuniary considerations; but the true reason was to be found in the unwillingness of the destined bride to hazard the state of maternity, which she rather openly expressed. Year after year she prevailed upon the good-natured lover to wait—she would be ready in the spring. she would be ready in the fall—and

thus life ebbed away, till the flush of youth was fading from them both.

At length the patience of the man was exhausted, and he threateningly told her that his position in society and sufficiency of fortune justified him in settling himself in the world. He felt an irresistible desire to be the father of children, the head of a household; he had hoped for all this through her lovingness of him, but if she continued averse to marriage he must break off their engagement, and ally himself to another, from whom he perhaps should derive less of tender sympathy, but whose unselfishness might gratify this need of his for a home and the delights of paternity.

The lady received this plain statement with floods of tears, and soon came to terms. The marriage was duly solemnized, and the happy pair took the usual journey, and set up their *penates* in great content. Now mark the irony of Nature, who may not be trifled with, with impunity. The husband had his full fruition of contemplated felicity in becoming a father, for in five years and less, by twins and triplets, the wife had presented him with eight living, healthful children.

Much of the contempt or indifference with which marriage is coming to be regarded, may be traced to the false notions prevailing upon this subject alone. The earlier inhabitants of our country were pioneers, and became possessors of great landed estates, from the profits of which they lived in something more than comfort, and were able to raise and educate their large families with comparative ease; but in the process of evolving the present state of the country, estates have been divided and subdivided till these old families are comparatively poor, and the young people now must look to their own exertions for a competence in life; but they would scorn the pretty log cabin where their ancestors lived on the outskirts of civilization, and they scorn also the more imposing farm-house, with its plain dressing and homely comforts. The sewing machine, the railway and express and telegram render it possible for the country ma-

tron or maid to dress as fashionably as the denizen of the city, and they do not fail to avail themselves of the opportunity; reporters and newspapers expatiate upon the silks and velvets and diamonds worn by ladies at receptions and entertainments, till a universal appetite for ostentatious display in dress has been created, and has been fostered by the tone of the press, as well as by the vanities and rivalries of the sex. This ostentation pervades every aspect of society, and is found in our expensive furniture, our over large houses, and a general contempt for labor.

The consequence is, that a young man cannot marry; the expense is too great, and the club becomes his place of resort. He rather avoids women, and is gradually losing the refinements of social intercourse, to say nothing of his deterioration in morals. If he marry, the wife will not keep house at a moderate expenditure of taste and money, and they are compelled to board. Here again is a new temptation to extravagance. All the earnings of the man are swallowed up in board bills, and dress and millinery bills. It is easy to foresee the end. Children are an expense and incumbrance, and not to be thought of. There is no check upon the husband by the tender council of the wife, and no silent plea from the face of an innocent child; he becomes wreckless, forges or purloins, and winds up a sad career in a prison, or meets death by his own hand.

Now why did these two come together? I see no motive above a gross sensualism or foolish vanity. No high or holy impulse mingled in their rapid worldliness. Neither made society any better for their existence; and if we could go behind the scenes and inquire into their childless union, we should most likely find it was made the worse by them.

Yet this is the experience of thousands, and is the growing evil of the day; and much of it—all I am inclined to believe—lies at the door of women. They do not uphold the sacredness of marriage; they do not insist upon a higher moral status for themselves or

the other sex. A vast, a multitudinous aspect of crime underlies these childless unions ; and women have too willingly lent themselves too it, by their unwomanly love of ease, of fashion and display.

They defraud the world of its element of youth and innocence by the presence of the child, and they dwarf their own souls by ignoring a state which is truly the perfection of womanhood, no less than the promoter of health and beauty. Let them live "in maiden meditation, fancy free," if they choose, but do not marry without a motive to sanction it, a pure expression of affection ultimated by the presence of a third, in the shape of a lovely image of the best life of the two.

The work-woman honestly and unflinchingly redeems her marriage contract, and in this way she is more praiseworthy and more to be honored than the would-be fine lady who evades her marriage obligations. She is not a fraud, nor a mean pretender to affection or morality. All is decent, true and real with her, and she has no fears of her good man, that he will give her cause for jealousy. I hardly understand with what face a woman, who is unwilling to be a mother, can reproach her husband for inconstancy ; she has no permanent hold upon his affections,

and her own life is no help to his sense of good morals. There should be mutual helpfulness in the relation of marriage, and as women are supposed to more fully represent the spiritual element, a man has a perfect right to take the law of companionship from his wife, and when she, by her imbecility or turpitude, disappoints his expectations the ruin is dreadful.

The medical records and the law records teem with the terrible disclosures of suffering and crime proceeding from the false estimate of embryotic life, and the wreckless destruction of it ; a crime as real, as palpable as that of any murder to be found upon criminal dockets ; and these crimes will be repeated, and this aspect of bad morals continue, till women awake to a living sense of the sacredness of marriage ; till they return to a sense of the beauty of the household ; till they feel that the family relation is the divinely appointed method for the true elevation of the race. The family, one man and one woman, living reverently together, rearing their children in a true filial and fraternal bond, is the one image upon earth of that heavenly mansion of which the Master spoke,

"When soon or late they reach that coast  
O'er life's rough ocean driven,  
May they rejoice, no wanderer lost  
A family in Heaven."

CHRONIC DISEASE—ITS CAUSE AND REMEDY.

BY VIRGIL W. BLANCHARD, M. D.

CHRONIC disease is one of the peculiar products of civilization. Physical vigor, activity and endurance seem to proportionally decline in the higher ranks of society as knowledge and refinement become the conspicuous, dominant elements in the character of a nation. So universally have these changes been observed, that historical writers have generally accepted the pernicious dogma as a fundamental truth ; that physical decline is a natural, universal sequence of intellectual development and domination. As a result of this false impression, a feeble,

sickly physical system is at present regarded as a kind of natural, or necessary concomitant of intellectual power. That this is the rule, at the present hour, among the higher classes in the ranks of civilization, I do not deny ; but I insist that it is not a natural, legitimate result but that it is a natural result due to the violation of some of the basic laws of human existence. I not only aver this, but I venture to confidently assert, that in the perfected physical system is found primarily the only true basis of intellectual activity and power.

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