

CHAPTER 12: The Relations of Husband and Wife

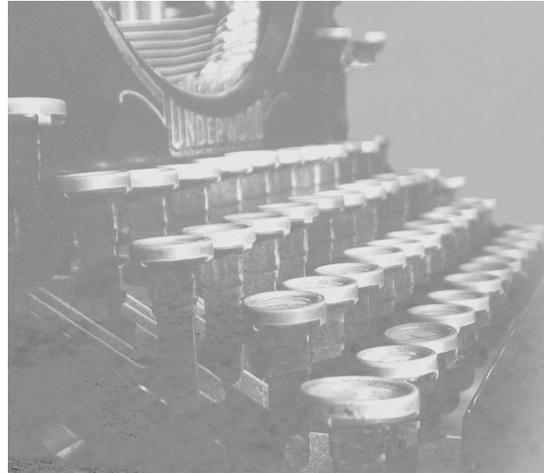
My Dear Comrades,

Now we shall all agree, that what Marriage proves to a man will depend not only upon the wife he chooses, but also upon his subsequent treatment of her. But that treatment will, largely, be influenced by the views he entertains as to the relation in which she will stand to him, and of the authority he may exercise over her. Three ideas commonly prevail on this question.

1. The first I mention is that of Proprietorship. This says in effect: "My wife is my property. I can love or hate her; I can cherish or starve her; I can protect, defend, and worship her, or I can treat her with every form of cruelty I can devise, so long as I stop short of actually maiming her person or taking her life."

I know that the opinions of society have, of late, very much changed on this question, and that laws have been enacted, during recent years, which afford woman some measure of security; and I know also, that kind-hearted people have formed associations for the protection of those who are, unfortunately, tied to such heartless husbands. It is an occasion of great joy to me, that The Salvation Army has succeeded in changing the hearts and characters of so many of these cruel sons of Belial, transforming them, by the Grace of God, from fiends in human shape, into men of tenderness and devotion.

There has been considerable improvement in this direction during my lifetime; although, God knows, things are still bad enough. But this is not, exactly, my topic now. I only mention it, because the necessity for making such laws proves that many husbands do entertain the idea that Marriage gives them the absolute ownership of the wife. Some of the baser sort of husbands not only believe that she must passively submit to them in all things, but that they are so far her owners, as to have a right to dispose of her, at will, as if she were a table or a chair. In former times, it was not at all uncommon; and, occasionally, we read even now of men, stupefied with drink, offering to sell their wives for a trifle of money, or exchange them for a glass of beer.



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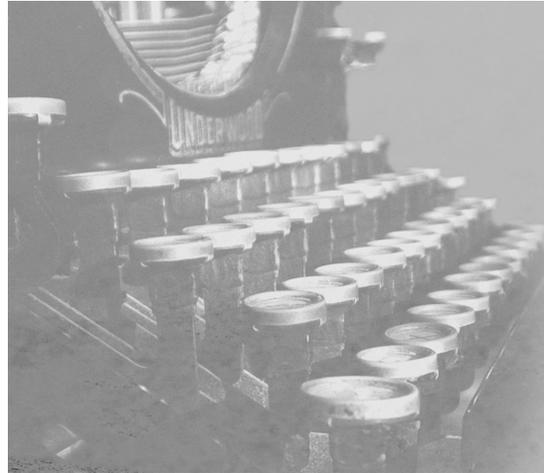
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A kindred notion, I fear, prevails with individuals, here and there, in the higher walks of life; although, the men who entertain it would be very much offended were anyone to hint that, in this respect, they regarded their wives with feelings similar to those with which they look upon their horses or their lands. And yet, is it not so? True, they do not treat them with the brute force which is the case with the rough crowd to whom we have been referring; but do they not injure and oppress them almost as cruelly in other ways? They trample on their womanly feelings, do constant violence to all that is highest in their nature, make little or no concealment of their own unfaithfulness or debauchery, and thus practically hunt them to the grave, all the while gathering a morbid satisfaction from the idea that they have a right to do as they like with their own. But many husbands who entertain these wretched notions do not act upon them. Their better nature, or the Grace of which they are partakers, prevents their working out, in them, any such results as I have described.

Here are two men, each possessed of a horse. Both regard it as their own property; each believes that his ownership gives him the right to kill his horse in his service, if such sacrifice should be called for. One of these men is of a hard, cruel nature, who does not think that horses have feelings; or, if they have, that it does not pay to consider them; and, therefore, if his interest could be served by it, he would not shrink from riding the unfortunate animal to death. The other man is of a gentle and kindly nature, and would rather hurt himself than overdrive or otherwise punish his horse; still he equally claims the right to do so, although he does not choose to exercise it.

Just so, with perhaps a little less distinctness, many men look upon their wives as being their actual property. Some of them act according to the promptings of their own brutal natures; while others, although holding the same opinions, shrink from dealing with them otherwise than in the kindly manner which their own just and affectionate natures dictate.

This idea of Proprietorship is very wide-spread. It is not limited to one nation, or to one class, nor has it been peculiar to one period of the world's history. It is, no doubt, largely sustained by the laws of most countries. While, as I have already said, certain beneficent modifications of the law relating to the protection of the wife's personal property have recently been enacted; – although, to steal either her clothes or her



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purse, is still treated as a more serious offence than to assault or disfigure her person; – still, the laws and customs of the world, civilised and un-civilised, uphold largely the idea that a man, by Marriage, is made the Proprietor of the woman.

2. Then a second and very common view of the wife's relationship, in Marriage, is that she is her husband's servant. I suppose the idea may be traced to the early and darkest ages of the world's history; and it finds its strongest expression among the savage peoples, whose whole social economy is based upon it.

Now, I say, this notion still prevails, and around us, even in most highly civilised communities, are multitudes of men whose chief thought in their Marriage, is securing a woman servant. They conceive of nothing higher than the supply of their personal wants – their food, their clothes, a home with more comforts than the lodgings they now occupy. These and similar considerations are always uppermost. In order to acquire these things they marry, and their wives become little more than servants.

This idea is strengthened, in the minds of a large section of the population, by the usages of many of the churches. In the Episcopalian Marriage Service, the woman is made to promise, in the most solemn manner, to honour, obey, and worship her lord. It is true that he is not actually spoken of as her lord; but the tenor of the ceremonial seems to say as much, and by priests and people alike, he is afterwards regarded as such.

Generally speaking, the church treats woman as an inferior being; refuses her the privilege of witnessing for Christ within its sacred edifices, and, no matter how real her piety, or how superior may be her gifts, will not permit her to labour in public for souls under the shadow of its authority. She is condemned, by almost every religious organisation in existence, to take the lower seat in its assemblies; and no matter what Pentecostal blessing she may have received, she cannot rise any higher until summoned, by her Master, to the Temple above. There, He will give her the place she deserves, regardless of her sex, for with Him, if not with His servants, the law enunciated by Paul will be eternally honoured and obeyed: "In Christ there is neither male nor female."

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3. Another view of Marriage, and the one which the true Salvationist will entertain, is that of a Partnership. It is a union of body, of mind, and of soul, involving obligations and privileges on both sides. The Marriage vow only marks the consent of that union. God's plan is, that the two beings thus united shall grow, more and more, into each other, as the days and years go by, until they are as one. Who has not noticed the marvellous resemblance that the husband and wife, who have been long united, often bear to one another? I have wondered why this should be so again and again. Perhaps it may be, that looking for so long a period at each other with loving eyes, transforms the very features to the likeness of the one so much beloved. Anyway, I have often observed it. And then, as to mind and heart, we all know how husbands and wives, who continue to live in true love, affection, and real agreement, for any considerable period, not only come to think and speak, but also to feel alike, with regard to matters in which they are both interested.

They are united. They are partners in the same concern – partners in the business, if there is one – partners in the house, together with its cares and worries – partners in the children, if children there be – partners in the soul-saving work, and also in the souls that are won – partners in the joys and pains, the smiles and tears, the profits and losses of the life below – and partners in the never-ending rewards and triumphs of the life above. Marriage is indeed a real partnership.

Now these divergent views are, undoubtedly, entertained by different individuals around us. Let us look at the effects of each, as exhibited in the minds and lives of those who hold them.

1. And first, let me refer to the one already named – that is. Proprietorship, My opinions on the subject are well known; and I have no need to say, that I condemn this notion as being opposed alike to truth, to common sense, and to Scripture. For consider some of its evil consequences.

(i) This view will, certainly, affect the whole estimate of woman as entertained by a man, and will drag down, to the lowest level, his standard of the qualities he ought seek for in his wife. Instead, therefore, of his Marriage raising the character of his life, and strengthening what is best in his nature, as God intended that it should do, it

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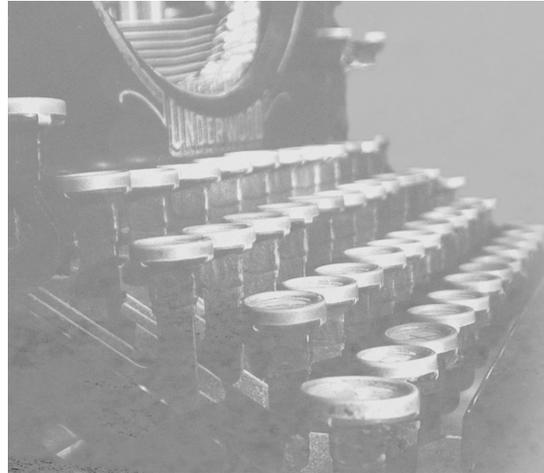
reduces him to a still lower condition of selfishness. If the woman who is to share her husband's home and to live in the closest intimacy with him, is to be merely like the rest of his goods and chattels, what better influence can she exert over him? How can she reprove what is wrong? How can she cultivate what is good and pure in him? How can she, indeed, ever resist his will in anything? That this horrible travesty of Marriage does exist around us, we have only too terrible proofs in the degradation and misery of some who, before their Marriage, were at least decent and modest, and had, if only at times, some idea of doing what was right and just. They have fallen, and their fall has been even beyond recovery, because by a perversion of God's holy order, the two who should have been joined together as equals, to help one another to live a life of purity and honour, have, instead, come into what is practically the degrading relationship of owner and slave; and this, alas! to the destruction of both.

(ii) This view will lead those entertaining it to regard woman as an inferior being, and is, therefore, a grave wrong done to the whole sex.

(iii) This view will lead the wife, after Marriage, to regard the husband as belonging to a superior order of creation; and hence, she will be likely to suppose that her chief business in life is to please, rather than to help him.

2. But the idea of Marriage as a kind of domestic service on the woman's part, is, perhaps, nearly as ruinous to all that is highest and best in the husband as it is in the case of the wife. There is a meanness about it which appears contemptible in the extreme. I know of no more humiliating thought, than that of a man fawning upon a woman, with words of affection, to win her confidence and her hand, when, all the time, what he really wants is a clean and inexpensive lodging, or a cheap and subservient domestic to cook his food and wash his clothes. I believe that multitudes of Marriages are little better than cheats in this respect; but it is not in this respect alone that the idea with which I am dealing is an evil.

(i) The notion of service creates alike the opportunity and the temptation for the exercise, on the part of the 1ms band, of all his natural selfishness at the woman's expense. This habit will, probably, grow stronger with the lapse of time, until he will almost, if not altogether, cease consulting her wishes, while he will regard her comfort



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with no more concern than that of the cattle which he drives through the streets, or the dog that runs at his heels.

(ii) This, theory of mastery will tend to the neglect of many of the wife's best qualities. Specially will this be the case with such as are superior to those possessed by the husband, or if she is endowed with such gifts as are calculated to provoke his jealousy or to reprove his failings. Feeling quite capable of attending to all the more important affairs of life, without the intervention of anyone inferior to himself, he will not be likely to call upon his wife for assistance in emergencies; and, consequently, her powers must lie unknown and unused all the time. The poet sings:

“Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.”

How true this is of married life! Thousands of dear women possessed of abilities and affections calculated to bless and benefit mankind, but not having the opportunity for their exercise, die without their existence being even suspected, and so they and their gifts alike pass away unnoticed and unmourned.

How often the wife will possess such gifts as prudence, sagacity, foresight, enterprise, or other qualities with which the husband has not been favoured; but they are never called into play; therefore husband and wife and children suffer, and the world is poorer in consequence!

(iii) This obedience and subjection of the wife to the weaknesses, wishes, and fads of the husband bears, as time goes on, sad fruit in the children, who, without being told, in so many words, what is expected of them, will grow up with the notion that, while ready obedience must be rendered to the commands of father, it matters little how mother is trifled with or disobeyed. This onesided arrangement, which is a direct violation of the Divine precept, "Honour thy father and thy mother" is answerable for thousands of ruined lives. The unruly children of such Marriages constitute one of the darkest problem of our time, a problem fruitful of difficulty also for the next generation.

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3. Let me now tell you some of the advantages which appear to me to follow the realisation and practice of the principle of Partnership, which you will remember I have commended, as the guiding purpose in a true Salvationist's Marriage.

(i) A man influenced by this principle will exercise more care in the choice of a wife. If he is going into a Partnership, he will see to it that, if possible, the party proposed shall bring as much capital into the concern as himself. If, for instance, he reckons his value at a hundred, he will not be willing to take as a partner, a girl whom he can only reckon at fifty. This view will, also, be very likely to lead him to be at the trouble to acquire a correct idea of the individual to whom he proposes, instead of being content with such stray information as he can readily pick up, which is only too commonly the case. Of course the man holding this view of the question, may be in danger of putting too high an estimate on his own worth; but the woman must meet him on his own ground, and judge for herself.

(ii) This view of Marriage will be likely to lead a man to seek a wife who is strong on those points on which he is weak. If, for instance, he is careless in the use of money, he will try to find a woman who is careful. If he is a doubter, he will look for a woman who is strong in faith. If he is easily imposed upon, he will try to find a wife who is endowed with a reasonable measure of shrewdness. If he is too readily influenced by the circumstances of the hour, he will desire a comrade who has greater firmness of character; and so on. Of course, such thoughtfulness, as is here described, supposes an amount of common sense on the part of young men that, unfortunately, does not too commonly abound.

(iii) The man who entertains this view of Marriage, and acts upon it, when married, will be likely to be considerate for his wife's capacities, and not make too extravagant demands upon them. He will respect her feelings, consider her wishes, and seek to conserve her health and well-being in every particular; for is she not his partner?

(iv) He will, in his wife's interests, as well as his own, draw out and make use of her gifts, so far as they are likely to assist them both in the battle of life, calling upon her to share the responsibility of his affairs, as well as to help him in the common round of her own special duties.



(v) The realisation by the husband of the wife's equality will lead him to make every provision within his power for the promotion of her happiness and comfort, and to treat her, when alone, and in the presence of others, with all due respect and affection.

(vi) This view of wifely partnership will lead the husband who entertains it not to take any important step in life without consulting her. He will inform her of his intentions, the motives that may have led up to them, together with the means by which he proposes to give them effect. Being a sharer in all that concerns the interests of himself, his family, and his possessions, present and future, she has a right to be conferred with on every matter likely to affect them.