

On Falling in Love

F.B. Meyer:

No flirting, young people, please! You cannot flit around the flame without the risk of burning your wings; and remember, if these are lost, you cannot get another pair; you may be able to crawl or limp, but you will never again bask in the sunbeams or dance with merry-hearted glee in the shadows. In other words, you may play at love-making till you lose the power of loving truly, or forfeit for evermore the right of entrance into love's most holy place. Finally, you may find it impossible to convince another that for once you are in dead earnest, and that the time of love has come to you at length. There is nothing more terrible in a woman's life than to discover that she has played make-believe so long that men treat her only as their plaything and toy, and think that she is incapable of the true passion. "I mean it this time," the flirt says, by look and manner. "I do not believe you," the answer is cast back, whether by man to woman or by woman to man. "I have watched you narrowly, and can count up the hearts you have broken, the lives you have wrecked. You are a Siren, whose bewitching music beguiles to death." "Nay, but I am genuine this once. I mean what I say." "I do not believe you; I do not believe you; I dare not trust you.

So, whatever you do, young people, don't flirt. Never appear to love when you don't. Never lead another on to think that you really care when you are not sure. Never play with another's affections, for fear you should lead to the giving of what can never be replaced, and for which you have given no equivalent. I am old-fashioned enough to think that a man or woman loves really only once. I know what may be said on the other side, but you must let me think so. The cream only rises to the surface in its full wealth once. The perfect beauty of the morning vanishes an hour after dawn. Therefore, you who have not yet given the one love of your life, do not let it go until you are sure that it is not wrongly bestowed. And you who are seeking the twin soul, be sure of your own love before you give a sign.

Some of the happiest marriages I have known have been those in which the man and wife were boy and girl together. They played the same games, got into the same scrapes, roamed the autumn woods nutting, and skated over the winter ice. But not less happy may those unions be which bare the romantic interest of love at first sight. It is wonderful, this falling in love. A man is going soberly along the path of life, with no particular interest in any one, when suddenly a face, a figure, a voice, crosses his path, and straightway his heart is gone. His ideals are realized, his dreams have taken shape. And from that moment, with that wonderful idealizing faculty, he imputes to that young girl all that the poet in him can imagine, or the artist in him depict. "I don't see anything in the girl," a companion says. But he might, poor purblind mortal, as well expect to see what Turner saw in a sunset. Take care, young girl, that you live up to that ideal. I pray you, do nothing, say nothing, to dash it to the ground; it is the most sacred power love can wield. Live worthy of it; do not descend to his level, but lift him, lift him to yours. True love is built on respect.

we can never forget that Robert Browning, when in London, was wont to repair to the church in Marylebone, where he was wed, and kiss the very steps on which his bride had stood. What love was his, of which she sings in those matchless Portuguese Sonnets! But what an inspiration for her, or any woman, to show herself worthy of the ideal which love flings over her every movement, her handwriting, the very trinkets she wears, the books she reads.

If you may not flirt, you should take every means of knowing one another. It seems to me that the practice among the working-classes, of walking out together before there is any thought of love-making, is an eminently wise one. We should hear of fewer ill-assorted marriages among the upper classes, if there were more opportunities of young men and women becoming acquainted with each other than can be presented at a ball or a crush. In the United States, young men can take young girls to places of public amusement without having their names unpleasantly associated by gossip. This were worthy of importation into England.

However it is managed, be sure to know something more of man or woman than is given when either is dressed in Sunday best, and clothed in most attractive and persuasive manners. All is not gold that glitters. Some people are like the baskets of strawberries sold in London streets; all the big ones are at the top, and those below are very, very small. Young ladies! I am sorry to say it, but some of the nicest of nice men are the most arrant scamps that ever walked. Do not believe their word, do not entrust yourselves to them, unless you know something more of them than they say of themselves. And, young men, I would warn you not to think that a girl can be judged by her manners in the drawing-room, or at a picnic. Try to drop in the morning; make an excuse of calling. See how she looks in her morning dress; is it tidy, neat, and suitable; is she helping her mother with the younger children; is she pleasant in her behavior to the servants? I had once to choose a wife for a young working-man, and was assured that my anticipations as to the suitability of a certain maiden were justified, because she opened the door of her father's cottage at ten in the morning with her hair tidy, a neat print dress

(the sleeves of which were tucked up above her elbows), and soapsuds were steaming all up her bare arms. "She will do," I said to myself.

Notice, when you are with the one to whom you are attracted, these points: How does the young man speak of his parents? does he call his mother, mother? Does he take an interest in his younger brothers or sisters? Does he attend church for himself, or only because you go with him? Does he ever suggest taking you into the public-house, or to some place of amusement where women are treated with unhallowed familiarity and scant respect?

As a young man acts in any of these respects, you may judge him; and remember, that little unsuspected words and acts on his part are more likely to reveal his true character than any number of protestations and vows. Every man reveals his real self once or twice to the woman he woos; and if only women would act on the slight suspicions which sometimes cross them, how many broken hearts would be saved!

Do not suppose that you can alter a man after you are wed. If you cannot fashion him before marriage, you cannot after. A woman dreams that when once she is wife, she will be able to mould her husband to her mind. It is a vain illusion, which in millions of cases has been rudely dissipated. Besides which, are we always able to command the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, especially when we have acted in direct violation of his expostulations?

If you are not sure, don't let your heart go, young girl. Break off an engagement rather than expose your wooer and yourself to lasting misery. It will be kinder to him in the end, because where there is not absolute oneness there cannot be lasting happiness. If he threatens to commit suicide, be well assured he will never do it. He has no right to talk to you like that, and is a coward to play upon your feelings. Besides, a man who talks so lightly of throwing away his own life is not one to whom a woman should entrust hers.

Young men had better consult their mothers or sisters before they take the irrevocable step. Women are quick at reading character, and those that love you will be most likely to choose well for you. Let the women of your family into your secret. Dear souls, they will guess your secret even if you do not tell it, and you may as well tell it; it will please them, and they will advise you well.

There is no harm in early engagements. When I am sure that it is a love-match, and in other respects suitable, I am glad to see two young people drawn together, though in their teens. Probably nothing will more certainly keep them pure and sweet amid the contaminating influences of the world. Let them begin early; it does not matter how long the courtship lasts. The courting times are very happy and blessed times, when young hearts are not too full of hopes and plans and anticipations to enjoy the pathway over which they are passing, and cull its flowers. But in these courting days remember that your relationship be kept on the highest level. It must be spirit to spirit, soul to soul. That which begins and ends with the physical will sooner or later land you both in a ditch. Take care!

Beware! The physical must be the sacrament and expression of the spiritual, else it will widen into the rift that makes love's music mute.

Mind that love-making be only in the Lord. Let it be ensphered in the love of God. Then, like the wedding-ring, the beginning will be everywhere, the end nowhere. For a Christian to marry one who is out of Christ is the grossest folly. Not only is there a flagrant act of disobedience to the distinct command of Christ, but there is the additional certainty that sooner or later there will be manifested an incongruity, a disparity, a want of sympathy in the deepest and most sacred subjects. I have had a wide experience, and been admitted into numberless homes, but I have never seen perfect happiness where this distinct command of the gospel has been violated; and I have never met a case in which the believing partner has won the unbeliever, except when faith may have come to the heart of one after marriage.

Lastly, to all who are unwed, I give my fervent advice: Make it a matter of earnest prayer. Let your heavenly Father choose for you. Do not think that life is necessarily a failure if no supreme love enters it. There are very happy and useful lives on every side that have never been blessed with a supreme affection. Live for God. Make him first. Wait on him and keep his way. In his own good time and way he will give you your heart's desire.