EDUCATION AS A PREVENTIVE OF DIVORCE:
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At this time, when the question of legislation on divorce is being discussed not only by statesmen and clergy, but also by many of the interested laity, it seems appropriate to inquire what divorce essentially is—whether it is, in and of itself, a social disease, a cure for a social disease, or a symptomatic resultant of more grave disorders. If we decide that divorce is, in itself, the evil, then we should expect to find a maximum of morality and happiness where there is a minimum of divorce. There are a few superficial observers ready to make this claim. But those who have to look below the surface of things have become suspicious of this conclusion and have been forced to believe that there is probably as much marital unhappiness without divorce as with it, and as flagrant violations of the moral law. But without divorce such unhappiness and such violations are more discreetly veiled than is possible when relief may be sought in court.

On the other hand, most right-thinking people will agree with the clergy that divorce is a very questionable cure for the evils from which we suffer, at best the clumsiest sort of social surgery, frequently causing as much harm as good by poisoning the blood of the social body.

Let us, therefore, for the purposes of this article, accept the hypothesis that divorce is really a result of diseased conditions and a warning that preventive medicine is needed. Let us admit that the real evil lies deeper than we have hitherto realized, in our lack of educative preparation for domestic relations, and in our conventional thought (or lack of thought) about the duties, responsibilities and privileges of married life. We have not remembered soon enough that what young men and women, or even girls and boys, think about marriage before they marry is an important determinant of their subsequent way of living.

Let us admit that the real cure does not lie altogether, or even chiefly in the hands of legislators, much as we do need uniform legislation in this country, but rather in the hands of all those who have any part in the education of the public mind and conscience. Legislation can make marriage more difficult, thereby increasing illegitimate relationships already too numerous, or it can prohibit or restrict divorce with a limited and negative result in the favor of righteousness, but right education can make the informed mind and the poised character which are necessary to the solution of great problems individual and national.

And this brings us a momentous choice. Either we must
abandon the great monogamic ideal which centuries of painful evolution have brought us, and set up for posterity a lower and easier ideal, thus taking a step backward for the whole race, or else we must prepare men and women to live in harmony with this ideal. Otherwise we shall always have divorce.

Roughly stated, the monogamic ideal is the free choice of one woman by one man and one man by one woman as mates for life. It is an ideal that demands more in the way of constancy and self-control than any which preceded it, and yet, perhaps just because of this fact, and also because of the security it affords the child, we have firm faith in it, and there are few who would be willing to give it up. We are inclined to agree that the race has, at last, made a good general plan for the marriage relation, and that our difficulties (as is also the case with the ideal of democracy) are practical rather than theoretical. We are all individuals sharply differentiated one from another, and it has become a matter of vital importance to us to marry the right mates on the right terms, and to be loyal to them when chosen. After ages of rigid discipline we have developed a sense of responsibility toward our neighbors, a realization that our marriages are important not only as touching our own temporary happiness and consequent usefulness, but also as they affect the lives of others. Therefore we have the monogamic ideal. But we have not been able to cut away the aftermath of the old systems of marriage, and with hardy courage to prepare ourselves for the attainment of the new ideal. Therefore we have with us divorce, which good clergymen abhor, good statesmen deprecate, and good people everywhere wish to avoid.

After centuries of shameful mythology which denounced motherhood as the “curse of Eve” we have come at last to declare the truth, even with lavish sentiment, that the functions of maternity are the noblest and most altruistic functions of physical life, and that spiritual motherhood is the greatest asset of civilization. But we are still childishly ashamed of the sex that goes before maternity and makes it possible. In these days of acute respect for scientific law we are apologetic for the reverent bi-sexual evolution whose highest triumph we are, and while, in our hearts, we thank God for making mothers, with our lips, or by silence, we chide Him for having made men and women diverse. Nor does the recognition of the altruistic power of spiritual motherhood lead us to trust in it, and to make it fully effective by turning its force into the channels of public as well as private life.

Our young people do not clamorously demand a knowledge of Greek, Latin, or higher mathematics, but these things we are care-
ful to offer them. They do, universally, demand a working knowledge of life and love, but this we prudishly deny. Yet we have only to read the “advice to the love-lorn” column of a metropolitan daily to perceive a genuine anxiety about the wise choice of mates, and a thwarted idealism, which, if trained and encouraged, would blossom into the health and glory of the nation.

Of course, we are properly shocked when boys and girls of good stock and fair promise “go wrong,” but we seem quite willing to leave them unaided by knowledge, to wrestle vainly for control with the mightiest and most superb of biological forces.

With naïve sagacity we advise boys and girls to marry “good” boys and girls, and think that in so doing we have done enough. But where is the definite standard by which they shall recognize “goodness,” when they are turned loose in a world that will deceive them if it can, and just what degree of goodness can they demand and find?

We have begun to develop our girls along individual lines, as we develop our boys, but we still expect them to be contented with a submissive life of marital dependence, in which the will of the husband assumes all dignified responsibility and control, and all liberty for achievement. If there is something of value in each human ego, feminine as well as masculine, then is it not as valuable after marriage as before, and should we not either be consistently Chinese in a refusal to develop feminine individuality at all, or else adjust ourselves as speedily as possible to a plan of life that will give women greater scope for achievement? And should we not foster conventions flexible enough so that a woman is not forced to adopt either cooking or calling as the chief duty of life according to the weight of her husband’s purse?

These are but a few of our inconsistencies—enough perhaps to hint at the causes that destroy homes through ill-considered and unsuitable marriages and ill-adjusted life plans. Oh, that our humanity were not afraid to be richly and fully human in its every manifestation!

WHERE there is no love—let it be many times repeated—there is no home, even though both persons with uncompromising firmness, resolve to stand by a bad bargain “for the children’s sake.” This requires a very substantial heroism on the part of parents and is productive of good, for, in many cases, it secures to the child a protection which would otherwise be lacking. But it is not health, it is not happiness, it is not idealism. That divorce may cease to exist there must be right marriages, and that
may be right marriages there must be love and educative preparation for the passions as well as the labors of life.

To this end we must teach the right things about sex before the wrong things are learned, and we must be ready to do away with all notions of marriage and love that do not coordinate with the great ideal we have in view, and are, therefore, a corrupting force in our life. The first part of this twofold task is difficult, but the second part is herculean.

It is not within the scope of this article to outline any scheme of sex education. Many of the best minds of today, here and abroad, are giving their attention to this matter, and something has already been wrought out for us in the way of awakened public interest and a braver and more direct approach to the questions involved. Suffice it to say here that sex education must no longer be sentimental, superficial, insubstantial and illogical, but definite, scientific, ethical, firmly established on cause and effect, and closely linked with the religious awakening of adolescence, so that its principles will not evaporate at the first encounter with actualities, but will stand fast in the reason, strengthened by the desire of the heart.

But we can do more than teach accurately the anatomy, physiology and ethical hygiene of sex. We can give young people, and especially girls, some knowledge of the why and wherefore of the right social customs. In homes of sincerity and refinement this is frequently done—but not always. And right here, I believe that some sweet-hearted woman of the "old school" will gently remonstrate "Innocence is very sweet!" Yes, verily, dear lady, but it belongs to the time when your boys and girls are always under your eye. When you cease to be with them hourly as protector they should be fit to protect themselves. Innocence belongs to childhood and to an age or conditions that does not make it necessary for young men and women to face the industrial struggle together and to choose their own mates and solve their own problems. There is nothing more pathetic than the young girl alone in a city boarding-house, unwittingly, unwittingly as God knows, and men do not know, little indiscretions which cause ill-natured gossip and bring hot tears of humiliation that are all quite unnecessary and only exist because the dear mother in her quiet home does not realize the danger and has not fitted her girl to face it.

Those who are eager to begin the reconstruction could not do better than read Olive Schreiner’s solemnly beautiful and prophetic book, "Woman and Labor." To read that book is to declare war on every morbid and unhealthy prejudice which prevents women from taking their rightful place in the world, and marriage from be-
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coming the glorious thing it ought to be. Let us now tear down a few old idols from their places that we may set new gods in their shrines.

One of the most persistent and hideous of the old prejudices is the idea that, willy nilly, with or without the right opportunity, every girl should marry. This idea is made the more absurd by our absolute knowledge that not all girls can marry. Once upon a time marriage was very nearly essential to women for their own safety, and quite essential to the women of a race of fighting men in order that the ranks be kept full and strong by the birth of many lads to take the places of those slain in battle. Under such a régime there was no place for the spinster. But our civilization is not a civilization of war, but of industry, and an individual's value to society does not lie simply and solely in parenthood, important as that may be. As it is no longer necessary for all men to be warriors, so it is no longer necessary for all women to be wives and mothers in order that the race may advance. This old, androcentric civilization that bred men chiefly for war, and, inversely, provoked war whenever men became too numerous, is passing away forever and giving place to a civilization at once more human and humane.

NO ONE wishes to dispute the fact that the woman who has a happy home, a loving and lovable husband and sweet little children is, indeed, blessed, and is living in obedience to the high behest of Nature and of God. But it is time to maintain, for the good of all, that the woman who enters into the bonds of matrimony for a home, or because it is considered the thing to do, without being sure of the love that would illumine the way, not only degrades herself, but paves the way to the divorce court by her insincerity. And it is time to show honest respect for the girl who is brave enough to go through life alone rather than become a counterfeit, giving to her husband an unsatisfactory and insincere relationship, and to her children a home life unsound at the core. And it should redound to the credit of President Taft that he has seen this truth better than most men of our time, and that he is decidedly on the side of good morals when he says, "I wish that every girl in the world were so situated that she would not think it necessary for her to marry unless she really wanted to."

In the interests of honest living it is time to set before girls another ideal, the ideal of service, which bids them marry and make all legitimate sacrifices with the right love for the right man, but, failing this, bids them give themselves over to such labors and pursuits as will make their lives strong, hearty, productive and happy, and will
enable them to contribute to our civilization in ways for which the married woman has little opportunity.

And why not do away, also, with that decaying relic of barbarism, the notion that woman was divinely created for the pleasure of man? In a certain high sense it is true, just as the converse is true, that man was created for the happiness of woman, each for the other. But in its generally accepted sense it is utterly false. It is not the chief duty of young women to attract or "lure" young men at all costs, or the duty of the married woman to gratify every whim of her husband without regard to reason, justice or common sense.

It is this idea, as much as any other, that makes the "trail of the serpent" apparent in the city streets today. It is this idea that is responsible for the oversexing of girls, the pernicious something which leads them to adopt, with great loss of dignity and value, a too coquettish dress and a too pliant manner—even a few of man's milder vices—in order to gain attention. It is this idea which prevents men and women from appealing to the best in each other, from rousing and stimulating the finer sex attributes, and which holds women back from the attainment of the genuine blessings, human privileges and real virtues which are men's!

In the days of new civic righteousness that are to come, we shall pay a lesser tribute, I think, to the coquettish, decorated, supersexed "eternal feminine;" for a woman may be as feminine as the pronoun "she" without any real grandeur of mind and heart. And we shall offer deeper homage, I believe, to the normal, natural, simple and serene "eternal womanly," for womanly no woman can be without strength, patience, fortitude, self-reliance and love. In those days the woman a man honors with an offer of marriage is less likely to be a flippant young miss who will bore him to distraction at the end of the first year, when he has had time to estimate her weakness and shallowness, and when the glamour has faded from the pitiful little tricks that won him.

We must accustom ourselves to another new idea—that as marriage is no longer a duty for all women, so it is no longer a trade or profession, requiring all the time and labor of all married women. Some confusion has arisen on this point because certain labors have been associated with marriage in the popular mind. But these labors may in the near future come to be considered as trades in themselves, not inseparably connected with marriage, and the wives of the days to come may be found performing diverse tasks. For we know that in our own times a woman may be the best of good wives and good mothers but with small knowledge of spinning, weaving, basket-making, pottery-making, agriculture or even baking, although all of these trades
used to be inseparably connected with the lives of married women. And tomorrow, owing to changed conditions, the woman doctor or lawyer may seem to be as desirable a mate as the cook or seamstress today. So much is possible!

AND here we come to the most potent of all causes of divorce—the conventionally enforced idleness of many married women—parasitism Mrs. Schreiner calls it—and the overwork of many of our men. As Mrs. Schreiner lucidly demonstrates a large part of the good, old-fashioned household labor of women has been taken from them, or at least from their direct control in the home, by the invention of machinery and the use of it by men. And women have not been able to balance this loss by assuming rapidly enough their share in the new intellectual fields of labor. Instead they have become, in ever-increasing numbers, dependent upon men for support without the old tasks that justified, to a certain extent, the old economic position of women, or at least made it consistent with self-respect. And it is one of the gravest evils of our times that, in order to satisfy certain pernicious conventions and support one or more healthy and capable women in comparative idleness, many of our finest men are compelled to hurry through life with no opportunity for culture and the sane, slow ripening of masculine character, with no time for altruistic service of the town, the commonwealth or the nation, and with no leisure for happy companionship with those women for whom he gives up so much.

The rush of our present life comes to bear most heavily on our most chivalrous. It wears them out physically and mentally and discourages them spiritually before they are fifty years of age. It gives them only time enough to nourish a vague doubt of the womanhood that is content to fatten on their toil, instead of laboring staunchly with them as healthy womanhood should do. They find their usefulness limited, their powers exhausted and wonder why. And then, sometimes in utter weariness they throw off the yoke and try to begin again. But the women are not always wholly to blame for this condition. Sometimes with a perfectly unreasoning “I can support a wife” pride, a man will insist that a woman should give up once and forever the only work in which she takes any interest, and leaves her a choice between idleness and housework in his home (which always, with or without fitness, a man will permit a woman to do)! But if a woman should say to her husband before, or soon after marriage, “John, it does not please me that you should be a lawyer—you must become a stock broker,” or “James, when you marry me you must give up the art that you love and become a car-
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penter,” would we not be quick to decry her injustice? Yet there are men who still say to their wives, “The work you love you must give up. You may do the work I provide or none at all.”

Of course, motherhood brings to women certain temporary limitations, but the thing we do not recognize is that these limitations are temporary. And, if, in all the ages past, women were able to combine with motherhood the most arduous physical labors, it seems probable that, in the present and the future when the demands of maternity are less rigorous, women should be able, with gain to the race, to enter the new fields of labor and accomplish laudable results.

Suppose a woman has been denied her own labor for conventional reasons and given the choice between housework and idleness. Suppose her children are out of her arms and at school and that a large part of her time is her own. Suppose that her husband’s income is just large enough to admit of keeping a servant, provided they do not try to save. She does not like housework and keeps the servant, salving her conscience with the thought that “when John gets a raise” they can begin to save. Then she becomes a card fiend or a culture fiend—it does not much matter which, and for lack of good wholesome labor, employs a caddy to help her keep thin. Her husband is forced to become a work fiend, a drudge, a mere provider, and can no longer play the rôle of romantic lover. He is too sleepy in the evening to attempt to keep abreast of her interests, and his accounts of his work probably do not interest her, since she is not a worker herself. Comradeship dies, and trouble begins right here.

Surely there is no greater safeguard for man and woman than the work in which mind and body can delight. Surely there is no more arbitrary convention than that which permits a man to dictate to his wife in her choice of labor. Surely it is time to give girls vocational training and permit wherever it is possible and right, the exercise of individual powers by married as well as by single women, and to say, with Mrs. Schreiner, “We claim all labor for our province.”

Nor is there any greater foe of divorce than the full, reverential and human companionship of the man and woman who are husband and wife. For both it is cultural and valuable beyond the power of words to tell. But it is only possible between equals, and, say what he will to the contrary, no man of good sense can respect as an equal the woman whose days are so many efforts to kill time.

And, if the marriages of tomorrow are really to be happier than the marriages of today, girls must demand this status of full equality with the men they marry, not an equality of privileges only, but
an equality in responsibilities, duties and powers, which, nevertheless recognizes that they are not identical.

The young wife must be strengthened in her vague belief that, although married, she is still a person and should be the director of her own physical, mental and spiritual activities, and responsible for them. For, when a woman, through force of misfit circumstances, becomes subservient in any great degree to the man with whom she lives, she loses, quite naturally, her sense of conscience and responsibility in matters over which she has little or no control. The old social custom which gave husbands absolute power in the control of wives had, at least, consistency to recommend it, since it also made them responsible for their wives’ behavior. Today the etiquette of life and the law of the land hold that women are morally responsible creatures, but the exigencies of life place them at a great disadvantage in matters of self-control.

When such a woman becomes restless and unhappy in her own home, she is shorn of all power to help herself because her thought and her desires have no value there, and she must go out of her home, into court, for redress, cherishing the sullen feeling that she “couldn’t help it” and was not “to blame!”

And, if it is true that girls should demand less of men in the way of unearned leisure and luxury, and more in the way of liberty to control their own lives, it is also of primary importance that they should demand more of men in the way of temperance, sobriety and chastity, and that they vehemently refuse the double standard of morals and stand firmly for the pure man as a father of tomorrow’s citizens.

Let the boys and girls, then, face marriage with their eyes open, knowing that the decision about marriage is the most important an individual is called upon to make. Let them be trained from childhood in the laws of sex and right living, so that they fully understand the duties and privileges of life’s greatest relationship. Let both be self-reliant economically, and offer them as many legitimate forms of amusement as possible, so that, by studying together, working together, and playing together they come to understand each other and do not make choice by force of proximity or moonlit fervid error. Then, having met and loved, let them, before they marry, make their fundamental life plans, assign to each other the places they wish to hold, agree as to their economic relations and respective duties, and so, with the domestic altar firmly built upon a rock foundation, marry and fulfil their destinies.

Until these things have come to pass there can be no adequate cure for the “divorce evil.” When they have come to pass there will be no “divorce evil” left to cure.