

Do Actresses Make Suitable Wives for Noblemen?

His Grace the Duke of Manchester, Recalling Instances Among His Acquaintances in the British Peerage, Is Sure That Stage Marriages Are Successful



Miss May Etheridge, who later became Lady Edward Fitzgerald, in an attractive stage costume.

By His Grace the Duke of Manchester
Written Especially for This Newspaper

WHEN I first read this conundrum that the editor had put me I knew at once that it was a base attempt to revive the foolish question craze. It ranks with and after the question, "Do married women make the best wives?"

However, if he really wants to know my opinion he is welcome to it at the price.

Mind you, if you take the question seriously, it really comes down to the question whether there is such a thing as a suitable wife for a nobleman, and the still more abstruse question whether there is such a thing as a suitable nobleman for a wife.

And then you've got to go into the question of what suitability is.

To add to all these difficulties you have to decide what is an actress within the meaning of the act. Let us start at the end and work backward in order to make it more complicated.

What is an actress can only be decided by each individual from his own point of view, but I suppose we all think of the great artists on the stage—Sarah Bernhardt, Rejane in France, for instance; Irene Vanbrugh, Marie Tempest, in England; Maude Adams, Julia Marlowe, Nazimova, in America.

Best Actresses Don't Marry Noblemen.

Please note, I cite these as types and do not mean that is a complete list of this type of actress in those countries; still, the number is small, and while I do not say they would not make suitable wives for noblemen, if the noblemen were so lucky as to be allowed to marry them, I do say that I know few noblemen who would be suitable husbands for them either by upbringing, instinct or taste. But this class is more limited than even they themselves think. The following, if not "Verdi," is at least "ben Trovatore," as they say in opera.

Johnny Toole, the great English comedian, was a great friend of Henry Irving, and they used always to be chaffing each other. One night at supper Toole said:

"Henry, I dreamed a curious dream last night; I dreamt I died and went up to heaven, and St. Peter asked me my name; I gave it. 'What, Johnny Toole, the actor?' I'm sorry, you can't come in," and he pointed to a notice which said, 'No actors admitted.'

"Sorrowfully turning away, I took one backward glance into Paradise and caught sight of you, Henry."

"I beg your pardon," said I to St. Peter. "How do you make that out? There's my friend Irving inside."

"Yes, but that's different," St. Peter replied. "We all know Toole, he's a real actor. Irving only thinks he is."

The next reading of the net catches the ordinary

leading lady in all branches of the profession, who does not of necessity place her art before everything.

Well, I can't think off-hand of any modern instance of a nobleman having the good fortune to marry one of these ladies, although at least one duchess in the past was an ornament to the stage before she became an adornment to the peerage. But when we come to the next sweep of the net, and take in the "small part" lady, and the musical comedy chorus we have something to go on.

I can think of eight or ten such marriages off-hand, and the great majority have been apparently eminently successful and satisfactory to the persons concerned, and when you think of the dead weight of prejudice that there is against such marriages in England among the female portion of the aristocracy, they must have been very suited to each other to live so happily.

One young nobleman I know was a case in point. Some years ago his mother (his father was dead) sent for a friend of his, a man of some experience, and said: "I beg of you to go and find my son. He has disappeared."

Greatly Improved by His Actress Wife.

The friend tracked him down and found him stupefied in the apartment of a woman of the class often maliciously—and untruthfully—called "actresses," and about in that condition to be taken out by this woman to be married.

The friend rescued him, sobered him up, and took him home to his mother. She was profuse in her thanks.

Six months later the mother sent again. Son was in trouble once more.

"Well," said the friend, "what is it this time?" "Oh, dear, he's going to be married to a dreadful woman called—in musical comedy! Do go and stop him."

"Certainly not," said the friend. "She is a charming lady, very talented, well educated, and if she really is going to marry him, he is an extremely lucky fellow."

The mother was furious and never spoke to the friend again, but he was right. The marriage has proved a brilliant success. She has turned a somewhat foolish boy into a steady and useful man and her company and friendship is sought after by society and she is the darling of the boy's mother, who has come to believe that she chose her for him herself.

I think the prejudice against a nobleman marrying an actress from the point of view of the women of the aristocracy is, first, the "trades union" or "protection of home industries" instinct, and, secondly, the discredit brought on the word "actress" by the application of the term to people who have no claim to the honor and who belong to an old but discreditable profession.

The last sweep of all takes in every woman in the world, I think, for all women are actresses, whether they perform behind the footlights or display their talents on the home stage to the bewilderment of their men folk. Why, some women even laugh at their husband's jokes!

To sum up, the only suitable wife for a nobleman—as for every man—is the wife who suits him and whom he suits. They have mutual love and respect and aspirations and tastes in common.

As in every walk of life there are good and bad noblemen, and good and bad actresses, just as there are good and bad persons and good and bad newspaper men (at least I think there are bad newspaper men). And nobody in this world can be certain how his or her marriage is going to turn out till they've tried and found out how the apparent good qualities stand the test of absolute intimacy.

And, as such intimacy before marriage is not "bien vue" in Aryan countries, there must, inevitably be unsuited marriages. But the fact that of the two high contracting parties one is an actress and the other a nobleman does not, ipso facto, mean an unsuitable marriage by any means.

Next Sunday the Duke of Manchester will write an entertaining article on "Are Dukes and Lords of Any Value to a Country?"



The Countess Poulett, of England, when, as Sylvia Storey, before her marriage, she was a charming stage mermaid.



The Countess Poulett with the two children that have blessed her entrance into nobility.



The Marchioness of Headfort and her interesting family. Lady Headfort was Miss Rosie Boote, of the Gaiety Theatre.

This is a conspicuous instance of a nobleman whose marriage with a musical comedy actress has proved remarkably happy, and is just such a case as the Duke of Manchester describes.