

Social Law Should Forbid Girls to Wed Before 22, Says Gertrude Atherton

Editor's Note: Gertrude Atherton, who for many years has held a position in the first rank of living American authors, and whose latest book, "Black Oxen," dealing with the rejuvenation of woman, has made a sensational impression upon the reading public, carries forward in this article the discussion of what is the best age for marriage, which was introduced last week by Mary Roberts Rinehart.

Mrs. Rinehart, under the title, "The Best Age for Marriage—19 or 22?" told the story of her own romance and marriage at 19, and how, as the mother of three children, she had already made a start upon her career by 22. She raised the question as to what the effect would have been both upon herself and her career if she had delayed her marriage until 29. Mrs. Rinehart will continue with her theme and her personal story in later articles, and Mrs. Atherton also will be heard again in this unusual forum upon the subject of love, marriage and the modern woman.

By GERTRUDE ATHERTON.

I AM OPPOSED to censorship in any form that curtails the liberty of intelligent adults, but the maximum of human happiness would be increased if there were an unwritten social law forbidding girls to marry before, say, the age of 22; a law, the violation of which involved the loss of social prestige.

No girl under that age knows enough to know her own mind. She may be bright, clever, even highly intelligent, but no natural gift takes the place of experience. Compare any brilliant girl of 18 with an equally endowed woman of 30. Her disadvantage is pitiful. Moreover, the older woman has the inestimable advantage of knowing that she does not know everything and has realized that she must go on learning as long as she lives.

I fix the marriageable age at 22 for several reasons. In the first place it gives a girl time to exhaust the irresponsible pleasures of youth before assuming the responsibilities of matrimony, heavy at best. I am now talking of the daughters of parents whose means permit them to enjoy their youth in the fashion to which every girl is entitled.

By 22, unless a moron (and the time will come when all morons will be painlessly destroyed), she will be ready to "settle down." As for that large army of girls who are obliged to go out into the world and earn their bread, they will have an even better opportunity to study men and life at first hand, and are even less likely to make a mistake in choosing a life partner than at 18.

Not Wise Enough at Eighteen.

A girl has by no means reached complete mental maturity at 22, but she is at least 10 years older in experience and orientation than when she left the schoolroom. The younger a girl the more abject a victim she is to the mere urge of the race. Nature is conscienceless and ruthless. And what is civilization for if it is not to get ahead of nature? With every generation girls are older than their predecessors at the same age. We hear so much sensational criticism of the flapper of today that we have leapt to the conclusion that never in the world was there anything like her before. But glance through the literature of fiction and memoirs. Ask our mothers and grandmothers. The same horrified criticism has greeted every generation of girls since the first mother announced passionately: "In my young days such things were unheard of!"

So wise and hard and calculating is the young girl of today that she has a far better prospect of making a success of her life than any generation of girls in the past. And of happiness. For these characteristics are a mere protective armor, partly affected, partly the result of complex modern conditions.

At 22 she will be wiser and older than her mother was at that age. Nevertheless, in spite of her pre-



GERTRUDE ATHERTON

Author of "Black Oxen," "The Conqueror," "Aristocrats," "Ancestors," "The White Morning," "The Living Present," "A Daughter of the Vine," etc., etc.

GERTRUDE ATHERTON, recognized as one of the ablest and most distinguished of American writers, has for more than a quarter of a century been recording the observations made by her keenly critical eyes. The quickened tempo of American life during the last two decades, shifting values in morals, manners and customs, the cataclysm of the great war—all these have served to stimulate her genius. From "The Conqueror," a semi-historical novel based on the life of Alexander Hamilton, to "Black Oxen," the most talked of book of the year, Gertrude Atherton has grown steadily in the power of presenting life.

Mrs. Atherton is descended of pioneer American stock. Her mother was a Franklin, great grand-daughter of a brother of Benjamin Franklin. Her father, Thomas Lyman Horn, also was descended of revolutionary Nordic ancestors, one of whom founded Stonington, Conn.

Born in San Francisco on October 30, 1857—her father and grandfather having been pioneers of the great western migration in the '50s.—Mrs. Atherton was educated in the schools of California and in a seminary at Lexington, Ky. But her real background of culture came from Stephen Franklin, her grandfather.

"I was educated by my grandfather," she writes, "and as he had the finest private library in the state, and was determined I should be well read, I owe the more serious turn of my mind to him, although I rebelled bitterly at the time . . ."

Before she had finished school at Lexington she was married to G. H. B. Atherton. Mrs. Atherton has referred to her marriage as "one of the most important incidents of my school life." Mr. Atherton died a few years later and Mrs. Atherton went to New York to enter upon her literary career.

Her first books dwelt upon California scenes, and the influences of her childhood are found in her early novels. "But," she confesses, "life at its highest pitch of civilization interests me most."

At 18, she is by no means wise enough then to select her mate, because no amount of precocity can take the place of that positive experience the years alone give; of a certain maturity, not only of the ego, but of the intellect.

The Peril of Illusions.

In the unfettered intimacy that now prevails between girls and young men, surely no young girl, no matter how romantic beneath her protective armor, can have any illusions regarding the male by the time she has entered her 20s; and illusions are the very worst preparation for matrimony in the devil's whole repertoire. So far no nation

but the French has accepted this great fact and outwitted nature.

Then, if a girl marries at 22, she has developed character enough to bring up her children properly, and to begin at the beginning. With her a baby is not a doll, as it is to the very young mother, but a human atom with every potentiality for good and evil. It has ten thousand thousand ancestors and it is for this reason that the spoiled child of eminently respectable parents not infrequently turns out a criminal. The more mature mother has had time to observe and appreciate that the badly brought-up child is the helpless

victim of a cruel injustice and is handicapped in the struggle of life that must come later.

The three essentials for success in life are intelligence, character and poise, and not the least of these is poise. But if it is not acquired early in life it is apt to be lacking altogether, and sooner or later will neutralize all that may be affected by the other two. And to parents as well as to heredity the strugglers of this struggling world owe this prime essential.

A woman may have her three or even her five children before she is well into her 30s, and from that time on she may have as many recurring youths as she demands. Certainly she will find a far deeper capacity for real and intelligent enjoyment of life than in those callow years when her sense of values was nil.

A Career With the "Second Wind."

With the arts, simple and scientific, known to all women today, she will have preserved the appearance of youth—all healthy and sane women invariably look 10 or even 20 years younger than their age—and there is a far greater satisfaction in looking than in merely being young. "Feeling young" depends entirely upon health and a lively mind. And today the resources of women are infinite.

Gone is the day when a woman was side-tracked and finished by the time she was 40. The club women started that revolution, and life has progressed by leaps and bounds since then. A woman begins, in these days, to live her personal life when the heaviest part of her sex debt is discharged, and as her children grow older and are more and more away from her until they leave her altogether, her opportunities increase with every passing year.

It is possible that all women, save the brainless, will look forward to some sort of personal career when the time comes to take their second wind. She will have fulfilled the primary purpose for which she was created, the persistence of the race; now comes her opportunity to learn the meaning of civilization.

Shirking Responsibilities

On the other hand, as time goes on no doubt more and more women will deliberately forewear marriage altogether and choose the career in its place. But this is a shirking of responsibilities, and unpardonable in this country where the dangers to the republic at the hands of alien races loom so portentously. It is all very well to be a free agent, and it is the most precious of all privileges, but as a matter of fact no such mortal exists. No one, unless he isolates himself in the wilderness, can avoid the interacting responsibilities of society. If he attempts it he becomes an outlaw.

Modern conditions make it possible for a woman to do her duty by her race—her, not the race—and still have her career. To begin it, moreover, when she is wise enough to reduce mistakes to a minimum. Moreover, no woman is complete who has not had children, and completeness of experience is essential to rounded success. Children are valuable if only for developing the human sympathies and enriching one's knowledge of life and human nature. It is an economical mistake to avoid the experience.

To accomplish anything one must begin at the beginning. There are isolated cases of old maids and barren women who have made a conspicuous success of themselves, but they are the exceptions that

prove the rule. And there is no telling how much more distinguished they might have been in their life work if they had begun by discharging their primary debt.

Children for the Nation.

As statistics show that the great Nordic race that founded this republic is being bred out by the Alpines and Mediterraneans that form the major part of our immigration stream, it is now not only the patriotic but the parental duty of every young woman of the old American stock to have from three to five children. It is irrational to say they cannot afford it, for the poor afford it and get along somehow.

Certainly there are many thousands of couples in the United States, either wealthy or well-to-do, who limit their families for selfish reasons only, and thousands more who could have at least three children if they were willing to exert in the right direction the principle of self-sacrifice that is the lot of every mortal.

If men and women with one child, to whom they are uxoriously devoted, would reflect that they are doing their best to deprive that child of future happiness and opportunity, by delivering its country over to a breed of revolutionists, intent upon destroying individuality in that most stultifying of all ideals, communism, to say nothing of depriving them of every other heritage, surely they would make the necessary sacrifices unless they were morons and incapable of thought.

No substitute so far conceived compares with the republican ideal in the opportunities it gives men and women for happiness and unlimited opportunity. In practice it may be faulty, human nature being what it is; it has suffered many abuses; but one has only to look over its record of achievement and compare that both with its own defects and with the history of the rest of the globe, ancient and modern, to realize that it is still better than any form of government the world has ever known. Also, that all substitutes so far put forward not only offer nothing in the way of improvement, but are infinitely worse.

Younger at Forty Than at Thirty

If this were taught, first in the family, and then in the schools, the future of this country would look less dark. Anything can be done with plastic mind. Spoilt, bad-mannered children are detested by all but their fond parents. Whose fault is it? Not theirs.

It is as easy to inculcate good manners in children as an appetite for the morning cereal. And it would be quite as easy to bring them up with a sense of duty to their race and to the future of their country, and to inspire them with a passion for large families.

What are the sacrifices? Woman's vanity. But that is too old an argument for these days. There are 20 different ways for preserving the figure, or restoring it, quite aside from dieting. Before long we shall be a nation of sylphs.

Pleasure? "But I want to enjoy life while I am young, not be tied down with a lot of children." The answer is easy. Don't marry before you are 22; and endeavor to realize that when you are 30, if you have kept your health and sanity, you will feel younger than you did at 20, and at 40 younger than at 30.

The women of a generation ago could not say this, but we can.

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Smuggler's Ghost Haunts British Inn

Portsmouth, Eng., Nov. 17.—There are simple souls who believe that at intervals since the reign of George III a "spirit" has haunted Bere Block Dell, a copse situated about a mile out of Emsworth, on the main road to Havant.

Twelve years ago, when an "apparition" was seen by an Emsworth fisherman, who was returning home late at night, the villagers banded themselves together in a determined effort to hunt the phantom down. The only reward which crowned their efforts was to find a naturalist catching moths at night with a large net. The "ghost" has appeared again. On Saturday night a cyclist was scared by a "filmy hooded" figure, which blocked his course on the road.

The countryside is full of rumors. Local people declare that they, also have seen the apparition, and during the weekend Bere Block Dell

has been visited by hundreds of folks from Portsmouth and district. Crowds watched in the darkness last night, but saw nothing. Many years ago there was a notorious inn known as Highwayman's Inn, near this spot. The house has long since vanished, but the story of a murder which occurred just outside it has been handed down.

This inn, according to local legend, was the rendezvous of highwaymen and smugglers. One night a French ship was wrecked off the coast. Smugglers promptly seized the goods which were washed ashore, and a French sailor, John Donbleau, who was found lying on the shingle, became the victim of a man named John Watkins, who dragged him to the inn and stabbed him.

Paris has 43 fewer hotels than before the war.

BRITISH TEACHER TELLS WOMEN TO BE FRIENDS WITH THEIR MIRRORS

Birmingham, Nov. 17.—"The mirror must not be regarded as a mere symbol of vanity," said Miss Ewing Matheson in an address to Birmingham women teachers.

"The woman of middle age should make plenty of use of it. It is good both for herself and for young people.

"It is extraordinarily important for the older woman to wear the right kind of clothes, and see that her expression is not allowed to become sour.

"Her lips may be compressed only because she is battling with some problem of her own, but how are others to know that?"

"The sight of miserable looking old maids sometimes drives girls into most unfortunate marriages."

The modern American home has 21 different pieces of electrical apparatus doing many kinds of housework. This does not include electric lights.

"Eternal Triangle" Case at Zoo

London, Nov. 17.—An attempt to form a family circle out of the "eternal triangle" is being made at the zoo. Bobbie, a Capuchin monkey in the small mammal house, has been given two companions of the opposite sex from whom to select a mate—Queenie, of his own species, and Betty a common macaqua.

Probably, from the love of novelty, Bobbie has set his heart upon Betty, but, as might be supposed, Queenie refuses to submit to such an order of things. Betty has a very caressing habit of smoothing Bobbie's woolly cranium, which sets him chattering with delight, but whenever such a tete-a-tete is in progress Queenie invariably "butts in" and spitefully disarranges Bobbie's locks.

If Bobbie tries to console her he receives even worse treatment from Betty, so he is generally to

be found in a state of dishevelment. Bobbie has a dumbbell for a toy, and of late has been making use of it as a bludgeon with which to smash the lumps of peppermint rock which come his way.

The keeper thinks he is getting in trim to deal with the trials and tribulations of married life. The official is keeping watch on distracted Bobby in case he may seek to solve the problem of "the eternal triangle" by the aid of the dumbbell.

While the plow has changed little in more than 3,000 years, a unique farming tool has been invented in France which attacks the problem in a new way. The plow is replaced by a number of metal fingers which dig deep into the earth, break it up and prepare it for planting, all in one operation. The labor of plowing and cultivating is thus done quickly and efficiently.