

The LETTERS of an UNSUCCESSFUL WOMAN to her DAUGHTER

By Helen Borden

MISS ALICE MEREDITH, care Mrs. Joseph Havemeyer, Madison avenue, New York.

My Dear Alice: Although your Aunt Katherine has never openly sanctioned divorce as the wife of that elderly doorman for chorus girls, Josiah Havemeyer, she can't fail to think of it with covetous appreciation. This being the case, what more easy than to enlarge her vision enough for it to take in the beauty and oomph of our arrangements? Parry her criticisms of me and her uplifted eyebrows—they're not real, anyway—with a line of talk like this: We admit that it is customary for mother and daughter to be eternally attached—no matter how disheartening the result—but we deny the infallibility of the custom and refuse to believe that divorce was invented merely for the relief of squabbling persons of the opposite sex. This will give her something to think about.

In reality, the conjugal entanglement has less need of divorce laws than have some other family connections, it being a whole lot easier to lose a husband or a wife than it is to lose a mother or father or sister. Moreover, the marital tie is not thrust upon one, but is knotted after some deliberation: whereas, in the maternal relation, for instance, there is nothing in the world to protect an unsuspecting woman from giving birth to a duplicate of her worst enemy—generally her husband's sister.

This is what happened to me, my dear, so unto Caesar I render the things that are Caesar's—and Caesar will be delighted, don't fear!

Since you left I have had another letter from Katherine. She seems ready to countenance any theory whatsoever that you will give her—ridiculous barren creature—a lovely ready-made child.

As a matter of fact you are, as you say, much more kin to Katherine in every way that counts than you are to me. She is an accomplished worldling and you wish to become one, while I, your mother, will always—even in a columbarium—remain more or less a daughter of the plains.

To be perfectly frank—and foolish—I was not quite positive of even our fleshy relationship until the day you unfolded your plans for our divergence. Strangely enough I never felt so little defrauded and daughterless as when, with accuracy and even a trace of humor, you sketched out my bewildering unfitness to be the mother of you! At that moment, for the first time since you learned to talk, I knew you mine.

Katherine wanted to adopt you twenty years ago, when you were a blue-eyed darling, with plump, ineffectual little legs. I still have the stockings you wore then, my baby—all of them—and sometimes when I am tired there is one pair, with creases about the ankles and a worn place where your tiny big toe used to go, that I can hardly bear to contemplate. I remember how pink your feet looked through their open mesh, felt again in my arms the inert weight of a soft little body. They seem more to you than you yourself, these outgrown baby clothes.

Don't ever blame yourself again for our separation. You have always been gentle and obedient—the failure is mine—one of many. Dear child, unless suffering spells success in this place "of wrath and tears," unless suffering spells success, your portly mother will never wear the laurel! So she wants you to be—as you are—different.

When I look back, my own life seems just one long blunder. From first to last I have never yet done anything that I would not like to do over—in some other way, in any other way. I feel doubts even about this latest act of mine; but since it is also yours, sprung from you, your needs and ambitions, I am reassured.

Of any further application. You had always read and practiced so diligently that your remarks were, to say the least, unexpected.

On consideration I saw that you were right; that you would never love either books or music or be able to expand through them. It was then that I began to encourage golf and John Meadows, for he, too, found musical machines satisfactory and books productive of slumber. Well, we have thrashed it all out long ago and you are gone! You wished to escape from the little house on the hill, you were tired of its bread-winning atmosphere, its worn rugs, its long rows of books, its homely, informal dinner table. You longed, as youth will long, for the glitter of the big, busy world, the unrest of ballrooms and brilliant streets. I am glad you know so well what you want of life. It is the surest way to satisfaction.

Probably two-fourths of the women in the world fritter away their years without ever trying to crystallize their desires or arrive at a definite ambition. Another fourth realizes the necessity for single-hearted wishing, but, through some infirmity of purpose, is unable to keep one desire paramount.



JOHN MEADOWS IS CONSOLLING HIMSELF WITH FLOESIE DAY



pleasant gossip, meaning persons who will listen to malicious innuendoes and cap them either with agreement or addition, preferably the latter. (There is no surer way to win dislike than by defending the absent.)

She demands that they render tribute—material tribute—in some form, either in the shape of invitations, introductions or perhaps in mere toadyism.

She demands that they be, or pretend to be, of the genus satellite. This is the reason you find women hovering in constellations or bunches, with one more powerful than the others (through wealth or position) in the center of the group, the rest revolving like subsidiary planets about her.

The "popular girl" among women is the girl who has entrance into the greatest number of groups—the girl who is most variously parasitical.

The moment she sets up a constellation of her own she ceases to be "popular," acquires enemies, sycophants and possibly a few friends.

John Meadows tries to comfort me by saying that no child of mine could ever become universally liked—unless she was dead! I wish I were sure of it.

D. M.

My Dear: Ever since you left I have been worrying about purely material trifles.

I always took superlative care of your hands, for I once lost a proposal I would have liked to have had (just "had," you know), solely because two of my halfmoons were almost covered by the cuticle. Of such trifles "love" is made. He told me all about it afterward.

While I am on this sort of thing let me remind you (not because you need it particularly) that you can't be too fastidious about petticoats and all that. You will find two dozen of everything in the big gray trunk. Never let your stock run down. Keep adding to it.

Always act as if your maid were next week to be at the ear of your most malicious acquaintance. You have as yet no "secrets of the toilet" to hide, but there other things. If, for instance, you chance to miss your morning bath, don't let her know it, and never exhibit any of your weaknesses before her. This will be fatiguing, but you are young enough to stand it. At any rate, it is a part of the life you have chosen—this espionage of servants and the necessity for being always on parade.

It is tolerably clear to me that sooner or later you will decide to marry, even though you are compelled thereby to lose a million. Let it be sooner. A bachelor maid's position in "society" is delightful up to thirty, but it palls, my dear; and thirty is not the age at which a woman has her best opportunities for marriage—no matter what the women of thirty may tell you.

You would not care to have a husband younger than yourself (his freshness would be unbecoming), and a bachelor of thirty-five is so apt to be baldish or apoplectic or worse still, club-footed. Oh, it is a vast, much wiser to settle the matter before you are even twenty-eight. You get a younger, fresher-hearted man and better children and (here's the vital point) your children know you in your prime.

Take warning from my case. I waited until frightened by thirty, with the result that before you and Hal and Will were big enough to appreciate such things I had lost my youth and most of my vitality.

Can even you, the eldest, realize that once your mother was a thing all fire and enthusiasm—beautifully alive with luminous eyes?

No, my dear, you can not. You think of me as having always been a stout bridle-haired phlegmatic woman of fifty.

It is not exhilarating to be thought of in that way, and moreover I have not had so much influence over you as if I were young and handsome.

"While ye may go marry," that is my advice. If Kate indorses it she will surprise me much. Knows large quantities of people (people on measures by the foot or quart) she has reached the age when her only chance for really active circulation among them is as the chaperone of some charming girl. She has acquired the girl at last—will she, do you think, be in a hurry to give her up to a husband?

This reluctance of hers to part with you will, in reality, be of the utmost assistance to you in marrying well—don't let her suspect it.

The shortsighted methods of the average mother who hurls her daughter at matrimony and jerks her son away cause most of the old maids in the world and most of the weddings, too, for men would never marry unless they encountered opposition somewhere.

Really, the only rational climax to the butterfly career you have chosen is to settle on the very nicest man in the world and make him your abject husband. Neither your beauty nor your money (even if you could keep it) would enable you to do this. It is quite impossible to figure out any system for enslaving a man in the way I mean. I've seen commonplace, dull women accomplish it and charming ones fail. Possibly the condition is due to self-hypnotism on the part of the husband.

But enough of husbands. At present probably all you are wanting is to see the world and to be sought by what Kate calls the "best party of it. Nothing is so fatal to this ambition as talking a great deal and praising one human being before or to others. It extolling a person it is ten chances to one that your approbation will not be sweeping enough to satisfy the recipient and it is certain that you will offend every other person within sound of your voice.

It took me thirty-three years to find this out for sure. As for talking more than is necessary, look at Sarah Moore! Her conversation is diverting, witty and her voice magnetic, yet at a dinner doesn't everybody treat her much as if she were a hired hand? The other girls flit, work off their little glances and dinky feminine stunts under cover of her cheerful performance, and the man who takes Sarah in to dinner is just as little in love with her as before!

I effervesce with amusement when, remembering that there was a time when I myself tried to outshine the male thing that wanted to like me. Even a peashooter knows better. D. M.

her hands. John always was silly about pretty hands.

Affectionately, D. M.

My Dear Child: Kate writes that she intends to make you the most popular girl in her set—with women!

My darling, the mother in me rises up in horror! I let you go to Kate, knowing her, it is true, to be wholly worldly and all that, but I did not dream she could be so callous as to enter you in such a race as this!

"Most popular with women!" Alack and alas the day! Dear, good little girl, don't set your feet on that track!

A woman occasionally contaminates her worthless body (kisses and embraces are chums) trying to attract more than her share of men, but she must infect her imperishable soul and degrade her very brain in order to be "so popular with women."

She must be double-faced, nay, forty-faced; she must smile and agree bland-

ly when every noble instinct clamors for reprobation; she must fawn and bow down where she should walk erect and unafraid; she must join in every hue and cry against the unfortunate of her own sex; she must be supercilious to "outsiders" lest she be counted among them! Come back, little white pullet, come back to your alfalfa patch; these be deadly weeds you are among.

If you insist upon staying where you are let me beg you not to separate men and women in your mind as Kate would have you. Treat them approximately alike and be reserved with both.

If you must have a confidante let it be a man, or else of an age either too young or too old for jealousy of you. Whatever you do, don't waste your time in collecting "dear, sweet girl friends," or in trying to win general approbation.

Happiness is often referred to as a mere battle; it is a solid sphere compared to Popularity, for the latter doesn't really exist (it being a figment of milk and water temperaments), whereas Happiness sometimes comes very, very near if we pretend to forget about Her and look the other way.

The delightful creature whom "everybody likes" is generally the least loved; and the regard he receives, collected and concentrated, would not compare either in quantity or quality with the affection many notably "queer" and unpopular persons win.

It is undoubtedly true that "socially" the favor of one woman is worth more than that of forty men. This is obvious, for, as Kate says, "One can't go anywhere that is worth going unless some woman invites you." Therefore I can contemplate peacefully a moderate degree of approval of you, from your own sex—but don't encourage it.

If you look the matter squarely in the face (that will be difficult, for it's a double-faced proposition) you will see that, in order for a woman to be commended by the bulk of her kind she must throttle every rugged virtue and every positive attribute.

What does the average woman ask of her bespirted intimates? She asks them, first of all, to be