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WHY WE ALL LIKE TO KISS

Evidently Michael Monahan has studied the osculatory arts and is willing to give the world the benefit of some of his experiences. In his wonderful Phoenix in an issue of recent date, he has several things to say on the subject. We publish them as follows:

I rise to a point of order. There is altogether too much kissing in the magazines and Sunday newspaper supplements; also in the asbestos favorites of the circulating library. Two arts are hereby joined in the indictment, for the literary offense is not less culpable than the pictorial crime.

A kiss in one of the Hearst magazines, for example, is almost equal to a statutory misdemeanor, and it makes the guileless reader particeps criminis. The artist always aims at the maximum of expression and effect, for the popular magazine is expected literally to kiss itself into public favor. Each month its gay-tinted cover bears the likeness of some pretty courtesan with rosy beak pouted for the kiss.

There is no mistaking the Hearst girls among the many Cyprians of the magazine trade; they have a way about them that is distinctly their own and that only the connoisseurs of love fully appreciate.

A sort of orgy of osculation rages throughout the world of current fiction and magazinedom, and the kiss is being passed around as an exceedingly good thing. A popular novelist like Mr. Chambers is generally rated by his kiss—I mean his manner of describing and realizing for the reader that species of caress between two persons of opposite sex. Upon this he (or she) lavishes all the resources of his word painting and all his power of suggestion. Likewise the popular artist is esteemed for his skill in depicting the kiss, in surrounding it with all those yum-yum attributes which are better felt than described, at the same time avoiding any license too gross which might give puritanism the alarm. It is a subtle and delicate art, and no wonder that those who excel at it command astonishing emoluments. Women are very partial to it, as the kiss is the symbol of their power and charm; and the popular magazine is above all things concerned with lady's approval. So even the prudent Mr. Bok makes much of the kiss both in text and illustration; but it is of the special Ladies' Home Journal brand, if you please, sterilized and, as it were, too good to be true—not in the least like the frank aphrodisiac of the monthly Hearsts. Mr. Bok's kissing girls never make you feel that you have seen them under the "white lights," or that they are out to sell anything—except the Ladies' Home Journal.

The word kiss, you will observe, is of the class of vocables called onomatopoeic—words that mimic the sound of the thing signified; and, in a sense, onomatopoeic must be the art that renders it.

Magazine fiction offers us all sorts and varieties of kisses—passionate, burning, lingering, languorous, Lesbian (the kind that makes you

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thrill all along the keel and gives the uttermost sensation of goneness;) kisses soulful, ecstatic, exalted; kisses pleading and importunate, kisses that madden and intoxicate, kisses that do everything but deny. There are kisses that lead to nothing worse than matrimony and a eugenic family, and there be kisses that conduct to paresis and the padded cell. Have a care then in making your choice, for many's the man whose undoing is determined by a kiss. For indeed the kiss is the woman, and the woman is your fate.

Persons of curious competency in this province tell us that the kiss between lovers yields a minor satisfaction of desire; it is a pledge, a promise, an I O U of the inexorable Eros, a prelude to possession. The kissed mouth will have the rest, says Balzac.

Maupassant observes that the kiss is only a preface to the Book of Love, but a charming preface, more delicious than the volume itself; a preface that one can reread constantly with ever unsated pleasure, while one is not always able to reread—the book!

The same instructed artist describes the kiss as the most perfect, the most divine sensation given to human beings—the last, the supreme limit of happiness. It is in the kiss, in the kiss alone, that we believe we can sometimes feel that impossible union of souls of which we dream—perhaps only the hallucination of fainting hearts. The kiss alone gives this profound, immaterial sensation of two beings that are as one. All the violent delirium of complete possession is not worth the trembling approach of the lips, that first touch, moist and sweet, and then that kiss, silent, motionless, rapturous and long, so long! to both.

Byron's description is better known to English readers:

A long, long kiss, a kiss of youth and love
And beauty, all concentrating like rays
Into one focus kindled from above;
Such kisses as belong to early days,
When heart and soul and sense in concert
move,

When the mind's lava and the pulse a blaze.
Certain rigid moralists hold that the woman who gives her lips to a man without lawful warrant abandons herself as effectively as if she gave all. . . .

This is perhaps going too far, but undoubtedly the kiss is a rare good thing, and we are passing it around joyously—at least in the magazines.

The kiss is woman's supreme weapon, her most potent and subtle means of seduction; not Caesar, not Attila, not Napoleon might prevail against it. For verily the kiss has conquered nations, torn up treaties, laid kingdoms desolate, founded or destroyed religions, suppressed dynasties and changed the order of royal states.

It is also, as we have seen, important to the prosperity of magazines, the fame of authors and the reputation of artists.

Oddly enough, the kiss, as we practice it in the west, is a stumbling-block and an offense to some eastern peoples, who are thereby moved to look askance at our morality. One hates to admit that, but those remote pagans, Buddhists or what not, unblest with the Ladies' Home Journal or the Hearst magazines (those disseminators of culture, sweetness and light), seem to have a more correct moral feeling than ourselves in this regard.

"Let the reader reflect for a moment," says Lafcadio Hearn,* "how large a place the subject of kisses and caresses and embraces occupies in our poetry and in our prose fiction; and then let him consider the fact that in Japanese literature these have no existence whatever. Such actions, except in the case of infants, are held to be highly immodest." Elsewhere he points out that the Japanese regard the kiss as peculiarly sexual in its nature, and that they refrain from it, except in the most private circumstances, as

from an indecency. Even at social functions of a free character, where geisha are in attendance and sake is drunk without restraint, a Japanese guest is never known to kiss or embrace these girls, dedicate to pleasure as they are; this infraction of good form is reserved to foreigners. . . .

But "East is East and West is West and"—I refuse to go farther with Mr. Kipling. In our half of the world sexe is deemed the salt of literature as of life, in spite of a conventional hypocrisy which would pretend to "wave" it, in Podsnapian fashion, out of existence.

So it is, by a shrewd compromise with our inherited puritanism, that we have perfumed and prettified sex in the persons of Gibson girls and "Bambi" heroines, and are enabled to pass around the kiss as a good thing.

Vive le baiser!

*See chapter on the "Eternal Feminine" in "Out of the East."

A young foreigner was being tried in court and the questioning by the lawyer on the opposite side began.

"Now, Laszky, what do you do?"

"Ven?" asked Laszky.

"When you work, of course," said the lawyer.

"Vy, work—"

"I know," said the lawyer, "but what at?"

"At a bench."

"Oh, groaned the lawyer, "where do you work at a bench?"

"In a factory."

"What kind of factory?"

"Brick."

"You make bricks?"

"No, de factory is made uv bricks."

"Now, Laszky, listen. What do you make in that factory?"

"Eight dollars a week."

"No, no! What does the factory make?"

"I dunno; a lot uv money, I think."

"Now, listen. What kind of goods does the factory produce?"

"Oh, said Laszky, "good goods."

"I know, but what kind of good goods?"

"The best."

"The best of what?"

"The best there is."

"Of what?"

"Of dose goods."

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