

# falling in love with open eyes



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With Open Eyes

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## Falling in Love

**G**EORGE ADE was sitting one afternoon with Margie, a little girl of eight. Looking up from the copy of Hans Andersen she had been reading, she asked innocently:

“Does m-i-r-a-g-e spell marriage, Mr. Ade?”

Mr. Ade hesitated for a moment. Then, reflecting upon the many illusions which cluster around the subject of marriage, he smiled wanly and said:

“Yes, Margie, that’s one way of spelling it . . . the way used by many . . . I fear.”

To the twelve million men and women whose marital romances were shattered last year by divorce, annulment, estrangement and permanent separation of some kind, marriage had proved a mirage.

“It’s not what we thought,” some said, as they called it quits. “It’s not what the novelists portray,” said others. “Nor the glamour stuff the movies show,” added still other disillusioned souls.

Is it any wonder then that persons in love stand in special need of counsel and guidance so that they “stumble not unheedfully”? For if love be blind, marriage is an eye-opener.

### A Universal Experience

Falling in love is an experience which

comes to every youth. Usually it comes when youth is at the threshold of young manhood or womanhood. The tender emotions which have been simmering during adolescence flame into raging love when youth singles out from among all young women the sweetheart whom he hopes to win as his partner on the journey through life. Around that experience cluster memories that will bring the fragrance and bloom of spring to the sere and yellow leaf of his autumn. Upon that choice hinge consequences that will stretch to the journey's end—and beyond.

Because that choice is made while the emotions are pounding sledge hammer blows upon his heart, youth stands at that time in particular need of guidance. Emotions tend to disturb the even functioning of the mind. They speak a language of their own—the language of love. But into that language, the voice of reason must creep and make itself heard. Love is proverbially blind. Only intelligence can give it eyes. “The magic of first love,” observes Benjamin Disraeli, “is our ignorance that it can end.”

Happy indeed is the youth who while listening to the soft whisperings of love, still keeps his feet on the ground and keeps at least one ear attuned to the voice of reason. Youth makes love in the parlor, but he must not forget the practicalities of the kitchen.

The eyes of youth tend to rest content upon the beauty of the face of his sweetheart, but he must learn to penetrate to the disposition and character with which he must live when the bloom of skin has long since vanished.

We do not seek to throw cold water on love's young dream. We want to see it come true. We want to see the radiant happiness of sweethearts blossom into the mature love of husband and wife, and reach the crowning glory of fatherhood and motherhood. We want to see the shining castle of their dreams materialize into the sanctuary of the Christian home, where love, peace and happiness abide.

### How Be Realized?

How can youth's dream be realized? By hearkening to the advice and guidance of our Holy Mother, the Church. She speaks to youth with the accents of the divine. No merely theoretical message does she bring, but one laden with the rich experience of the centuries.

She has listened at the altar as millions of young couples plighted their deathless troth. She has listened to the stories of domestic tragedies and has seen eyes heavy with tears. She has fought against the lust of kings in protection of the sanctity of Christian marriage and the permanence of the Christian

home. Better than any institution in the world, the Church can guide youth safely along that dangerous path, strewn with a thousand pitfalls, that leads to the threshold of a happy marriage and to the fireside of a Christian home.

Pointing out that marriage is indissoluble except by death, the Church warns young people to be on their guard against the factors which make for separation and divorce. One of the chief causes is that the couple discovers after marriage that they are mismated. When the dreamland of their honeymoon has yielded to the realities of a work-a-day world, they begin to perceive what a blind man could have pointed out to them before — that they have little in common.

They are uncongenial in temperament and disposition, they differ in moral character and in religious outlook, they vary in culture and in tastes. The delicate bonds which spring from congeniality in these fields and remain intact even after mere sentiment has largely shot its bolt, are lacking. Association first loses its charm, then its interest. Boredom sets in and finally yields to chafing and aversion. The divorce court has new grist for its mills.

### “We’re So Different”

“Father,” said Betty, “Chris and I are



having tough sledding. We're so different . . . in culture, in tastes, in family background. My grandparents came from England. His parents are from Greece . . . speak broken English. When they visit us, they talk mostly in Greek, and make me feel like I'm in a foreign country. Chris reflects their racial customs . . . so different from ours.

"He thinks a wife should stay at home and frowns on my having any outside activities. He gets furiously jealous. We have little in common . . . it's hard to carry on a sustained conversation with Chris. The physical element of sex isn't enough to hold a couple together. There must be some mental bond too."

"Where were your eyes before marriage, Betty?" I asked. "Didn't you notice any of these radical differences while you were going together?"

"I guess sentiment blinded me . . . He was a tackle on the football team . . . the glamour surrounding a prominent athlete at school blinded me . . . I guess. And our talk was pretty superficial and frivolous. . . Now the differences are so big, they shriek at me . . . and marriage is becoming a nightmare."

She broke down and wept. "All my life," she sighed, "I've dreamed of a happy marriage . . . where there would be real companionship . . . a genuine sharing of interests . . . love and happiness. . . . Now it's bore-

dom . . . and worse. . . . The prospect of that for the rest of my days gives me the creeps . . . it frightens me.”

Betty was crying now as though her heart would break. She had apparently forgotten that the drawing of a mate is the one kind of lottery in which you can't tear up your ticket if you lose.

How I wish that I could have had all the youth of our land at my side to see the doleful, tragic consequences of rushing into an ill-considered marriage . . . parking one's reason outside and acting on blind sentiment. How forcefully that scene would have shouted in the ears of each of them the warning words, “Stop, Look and Listen!” People who rush on to the track of an on-coming train, refusing to heed that sign, pay an awful penalty. So too, do those who rush into ill-considered, uncongenial marriages.

### Things Which Count

Why do not young people perceive these facts before it is too late? Why do so many of them make no honest effort to explore beforehand those important qualities of mind and character without which any union rests only on the quicksands of capricious sentiment?

A young man seeks to court a girl because of the texture and color of her skin, the

radiance of her eyes, the contour of her face, and other superficial items. But character, disposition, intelligence, understanding, sympathy and unselfishness are the things which count in making for the happiness of the home and the permanence of the union. Twenty-four hundred years ago Euripides, the Greek poet, perceived this truth and expressed it in a pregnant line in *Andromache*: *'Tis not beauty that bewitcheth bridegrooms. but nobleness.*

While beauty and good looks are not to be disparaged, the qualities of mind, heart and soul above mentioned are far more valuable. The delicate coloring of the skin changes, the beauty of the complexion vanishes, but *character* remains. It grows in strength and beauty and unselfishness with the passing years. The man who seeks to build the citadel of his conjugal happiness upon such gossamer threads as complexion and appearance, with scant attention to moral character and disposition, often finds out later that he has neglected the important item of a solid foundation. True happiness is seldom found in a fool's paradise. A marriage based on mere infatuation usually turns out to be the purchase of a month of honey with a life time of vinegar.

"Father," remarked Joe, "the boys at the fraternity house sort of envied me when I was dating Evelyn. She was chosen the

beauty queen at our Senior prom. It was politics, of course, frats and sororities voting per agreement. I married her at the end of my Junior year. I thought I was getting a prize . . . but our moral standards are a world apart. She puts her figure above children . . . and is making a mockery of marriage . . . frustrating its primary purpose.”

“Did you ever discuss the matter of children when you were dating her?” I asked. “Did you take time to see that you shared the same fundamental view of marriage . . . the same moral principles and beliefs?”

“I just took those things for granted. . . I thought every girl wanted children. . . I had my head in the sand . . . like an ostrich, I guess.”

The Church urges young people to select their helpmate for life with due regard to the important requisites for a happy and enduring union. She warns them in advance that they will pay a heavy penalty for negligence, for impetuosity, for rashness in this matter. Before she admits candidates to the priesthood, she requires them to spend long years in training and discipline, meditating all the while on the seriousness of the step they contemplate. Yet Holy Orders imposes an obligation of no greater duration than that imposed by matrimony. The consequences of both last until death. Why then

should not candidates for matrimony bestow at least a small measure of the care and consideration demanded of those who aspire to the sacred ministry?

### A Momentous Decision

The simple truth is that all the voices of earth and sky and heaven thunder in the ear of the young person contemplating marriage to make sure of the presence of these qualities of mind and heart and soul which alone can guarantee lasting happiness for his union. While the heart may flutter on the wings of love, he should keep his feet on the solid ground of reality, listen to the voice of reason, and look carefully whither he is about to leap. In every domain of human life the use of reason yields a rich premium, its neglect a heavy penalty. In no field, however, is the premium richer or the penalty heavier than in the choice of a partner for all the years of one's life.

Prudence suggests that before making so momentous a choice, the advice of parents and of other sensible people of experience should be sought. Before making an investment of consequence, a prudent person will secure the counsel of other parties, better informed and more experienced than himself. While such counsel is by no means infallible, at least it greatly lessens the hazards involved.

When a person is about to invest his whole life with its hopes of enduring happiness, why should he not at least consult wise and judicious counsellors about the momentous choice he is contemplating?

Many young people in love act thoughtlessly. Instead of asking a prudent person for counsel, they stumble blindly into disaster. The tendency of young people to confide in no one about their engagement, and to keep the whole affair a secret until after the marriage, closes the door to many helpful influences which would at least lessen the danger of an obviously unwise choice. No other decision which a person is ever called upon to make involves consequences of a farther-reaching character than that entailed in the selection of a helpmate for life. Does it not follow, therefore, that here above all other places, a young person should exhaust all his prudence and common sense to see that he does not make a fatal error?

### No Substitute for Prudence

Older persons will recall the words of a ditty, popular a generation ago, but voicing the question in the minds of many in this day as well:

*Will some one kindly tell me,  
Will some one let me know,  
How I picked a lemon in the garden of Love  
Where I thought only peaches grow?*

If the person asking this question afterwards had only consulted sensible friends beforehand, he would have found an abundant answer to the query he asks now—all too late. Life knows no adequate substitute for prudence and practical common sense.

Thousands upon thousands of marriages occur each year and end shortly in the divorce court. Why? Simply because young people insist upon throwing reason overboard, and refuse to consider the factors indispensable for a stable union and enduring happiness.

Why do so many lament afterwards: "If I had only stopped to think! If I had listened to my reason instead of hearkening only to the flutterings of my heart, I would have perceived how blind and how foolish I was! Oh! if I were only free to make the choice over again, I would not be such a fool!" What pastor has not heard the above refrain with too tragic a frequency? Indeed it is not too much to say that if young people used prudence and common sense, consulted wise and judicious friends, explored the item of congeniality in matters other than sentiment, and made sure of the character, disposition, reliability and religious outlook of the person involved, the vast majority of unfortunate marriages ending in disaster would be avoided.

It is one thing to know a truth. It is a different thing to practice it.

The Church never wearies of pointing out to her children the supreme importance of exercising the greatest care in the selection of a partner for life.

### Danger of Haste

One of the dangers which the Church warns against is that of excessive haste. Her law requiring the proclamation of the banns on three Sundays preceding the wedding, serves as a brake against too precipitate action. Judges who preside at divorce courts have repeatedly voiced the conviction that a large percentage of the cases appearing before them are traceable to excessive haste. "Marry in haste and you repent at leisure" is the modern version of the adage current centuries ago: "Marriage leapeth upon the saddle, and repentance upon the crupper," i.e., the harness behind the saddle. "Time," says Shakespeare, "goes on crutches till love has all his rites."

A young man takes a sudden fancy to a girl. It is probably kindled by her complexion, her contour, or the radiance of her eyes. Infatuation, but not love, comes at first sight. A whirlwind courtship ends in sudden elopement. They awake from the honeymoon to discover they are as different



from one another as day is from night. The divorce court will not be idle long.

“I’ve been a chump, Father,” said Dan. “I fell for a pretty dancer at a night club. But I didn’t know what I was letting myself in for. She has no interest in the home . . . she wants to keep up the night life pace . . . She’s out night after night . . . dancing, singing, though she doesn’t have to work. When she returns, there’s always a couple of hangers-on with her. It looks as though I’ve married the whole night club. It can’t keep up this way . . . long.”

“You wanted a different type for your wife, Dan? Why then did you choose this kind of a butterfly?”

“I’m afraid, Father, I didn’t use my head,” he replied sadly. “She fluttered her eye-lashes . . . heavy with mascara, I found out later . . . at me, and I went overboard. If I had it to do over again, I’d look for a girl with character, that takes marriage seriously and thinks of home and children instead of gadding about in night clubs till the wee hours of the morning.”

Dan had forgotten that wedlock is a one-way highway on which no turning back is permitted . . . a boulevard with no cross-roads for escape. He was, however, beginning to realize the truth of Richard Steele’s words: “The marriage state, with and with-

out the affection suitable to it, is the completest image of Heaven and Hell we are capable of receiving in this life.”

### Warning Against Haste

As a result of their observations, jurists have frequently sounded the tocsin against precipitate speed in rushing into marriage. They have urged the enactment of laws requiring individuals to register their intention to wed and then to wait for a certain length of time before the marriage could occur. The idea is that in the required interval the ardor of many mismated couples would cool and allow them to see each other with the eyes of reason and not merely through the rose-colored lens of inflamed emotions. The garish light of day reveals a multitude of imperfections, glaring and strident, but glossed over by the magic of the moonlight calling forth dreams of high romance. In the effort to stem the flood of such ill-considered unions, some states have already enacted laws along the line above suggested.

In a class in sociology at Columbia University the late Professor F. H. Giddings was pointing out the urgent need for some such brake upon the too precipitate speed of couples eager to act in haste only to repent at leisure. Whereupon a Catholic student explained the Church's law in regard to the

proclamation of the banns. The explanation evoked from Professor Giddings the following interesting observation:

“Aside entirely from its religious implications, I want to commend highly the social utility of such a law. As a professor of sociology, I am convinced that if such a law were enacted by every state in the Union, it would enable a vast number of mismated couples to discover their uncongeniality before they rushed headlong into the marital contract only to clutter up the docket of the divorce court later on.” This law of the Church is, therefore, a safeguard for marriage not only in its sacramental character but also as an institution that plays a vital role in the welfare of human society.

### Excessive Length

While the Church warns against courtships of undue brevity, she likewise counsels against those of excessive length. No hard and fast rule can be laid down determining the exact length of courtship. In general it should be of sufficient duration to allow young people to know the character and disposition of each other quite well. This can usually be done in a period ranging from six months to a year. Being a period of stress and strain in many respects, courtship too long drawn out wears away the glamour and

leads many a promising romance to the rocks.

“A date with Herb,” said Maralyn “has lost the thrill it once had. We’ve been going together four years. It’s too long. The romance and the glamour have all disappeared. We get on each other’s nerves now. If we had married a couple of years ago, we would have had the grace of the sacrament to sustain us, and we’d have made a go of it.”

“Four years is too long a time,” she continued, “to go on making love . . . and not getting married. It’s pointless, silly and kills many a romance that would have matured into a good marriage if it were not held too long in the hot-house, artificial stage of courtship . . . with neither the conjugal relationship nor the sacramental grace to sustain it.”

The function of courtship is to enable young people to know each other sufficiently well to embark together on life’s voyage. But where no such end is anticipated, courtship has little or no meaning. Courtship may be compared to a porch, over which people walk to reach the door of the house. What would you think of people who entered upon the porch and proceeded to remain there indefinitely, just as though they were unaware that it was not intended as the terminal but merely as the entrance to the home proper?

Similar is the state of those who, having entered upon courtship, forget that it is not the end but merely the means to the end, merely the vestibule leading to the great sacrament.

### Is It Fair?

Young men at times draw out courtship to such unending length.

The simple fact is that a grievous injustice can be done to a girl by monopolizing her attention for several years, depriving her of many other opportunities, and then when her youthful charm has waned, walking out. It is neither chivalrous nor honorable. Neither is it fair nor just. When courtship is being protracted to unseemly length, the father of the girl should inquire of the young man what his intentions are—and incidentally what is the reason for the long delay.

In America we carry to extremes the idea that marriage is an affair that concerns only the two individuals involved. If parents are genuinely interested in the happiness of their daughter, why should they not manifest that solicitude in the honest and effective manner just mentioned? In the countries of Europe, parents take a much more active part in assisting their children in forming suitable unions. They view the matter with less sentiment, perhaps, but with much more prac-

tical common sense. The time has come in America, with its divorce rate mounting higher than that of any other country in the civilized world, when parents and pastors must take an increasing interest in assisting young people in the successful solution of the most crucial problem life presents to them—the choice of a helpmate for life.

In common with all mankind, young people are engaged in the endless quest for happiness. But happiness is not a private nor solitary affair. Suppose that we say to an individual: "Here is a thousand dollars . . . Go and buy happiness for yourself alone. You must not seek it, however, in the friendship and love of other people." We would be assigning to him an end, but would be forbidding him the only effective means of achieving it.

Why? Because happiness is a social affair. It is found in the esteem and friendship and love of others. Like the moon which shines by reflected light, happiness is found in the reflection of the sympathy, trust and affection of others. Wealth, knowledge and fame are no adequate substitutes for the latter, and hence cannot bring true happiness.

### **The Light of Love**

Among the worst miseries of life is that of unrelieved loneliness. To go to one's dwell-

ing at evening only to find it empty of any person interested in your struggles, rejoicing in your achievement, softening the sting of defeat with the balm of sympathy and understanding, is to live in a darkened chamber whither the sunshine of human comradeship and love scarcely penetrates.

As other forms of life, when deprived of the sun's rays, wither and die, so human life robbed of the sunshine of love and sympathy, loses its zest, its enthusiasm and its vigor. Love is the radiance which brightens the world of human life with the sunshine of happiness. Francis William Bourdillon expressed a profound truth when he wrote in lines of simple beauty:

*The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright world dies  
With the dying sun.*

*The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies  
When love is done.*

### A Safeguard

“It is not good for man to be alone. . .” How often the words of Almighty God, uttered at the dawn of the race's history, come back to the priest as he sits for long

hours in the tribunal of confession listening to the sins of men and women journeying alone over life's highway. How vividly he comes to realize the meaning of that divine admonition. No one can realize more clearly than the priest of God, to whom are unbosomed the secrets of hearts, the dangers, pitfalls, and tragedies that beset the path of the lonely traveller.

God created a helpmate like unto himself to be a companion for man, promoting his happiness and a protector of his virtue. The sacrament of matrimony is, therefore, a great source of mutual consolation, as it is a great safeguard for the virtue of both men and women. That is why the confessor will often have occasion to point to the sacrament of matrimony as an invaluable spiritual prophylactic and an important aid in the attainment of one's eternal salvation.

Aside entirely, however, from its spiritual succour, matrimony is among the most potent influences in the development of the human personality to its manifold perfections and in the promotion of human happiness. As the bud on the rose bush reaches its full bloom only by opening its petals, shedding its perfumed fragrance on the passing zephyrs and dying to itself in the full-blown blush of its mature beauty, so human character is spiritualized and rendered beautiful and unselfish by losing itself in ministering to others.



## A Million Dollars

If some wealthy philanthropist were to promise to bestow upon a young man upon reaching maturity the gift of a million dollars, how delighted he would be! Yet Providence stands ready to confer upon every young man on reaching maturity an even greater gift—the love of a good and virtuous girl.

That is the gift which Almighty God stands ready to bestow upon every young man who proves himself worthy of the great sacrament of matrimony. For the flame of love that burns in the bosoms of sweethearts is kindled by no human hand, but by a spark from the love that is eternal and divine. That is the gift which transmutes for all his men the toil of life into a labor of love. It is God's perfect gift to man. When will young men come to learn that happiness is to be found not amid the crash of a jazz orchestra but at the fireside of the home?

The sophistication of the twentieth century has not rendered superfluous nor out-of-date the warning of the Most High, uttered at the dawn of human history: "It is not good for man to be alone." That warning is of perennial timeliness to every generation of men, for it is based upon the unchanging hunger and the ceaseless questing of the human heart for love and happiness.

To the millions of young men and women in whose hearts love is beginning to sing its ageless song, calling them to life's great adventure, we say an earnest and affectionate: "Stop, Look and Listen!" To each of the unnumbered legion of young people who, finding themselves on the brink of love, ask us in all the eager innocence of youth the age-old question of Julia, "Wouldst thou then counsel me to fall in love?" We answer in the words of Lucetta: "Ay, so you stumble not unheedfully."

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